COMRADES AND CITIZENS

[SOVIET PEOPLE]

by

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With an Introduction by

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To

MY FATHER

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INTRODUCTION

THE GIFTED WRITER of the following pages disclaims any capacity for abstract reasoning, whether Marxist or anti-Marxist; she even implies that she has no scientific knowledge of social institutions. I may observe that she started out with a knowledge of the Russian language, which during her service as a travelling reporter for the *Moscow Daily News*, she developed into an unusual capacity for lively conversation in third class carriages, huts and houses. She writes, so she tells us in her preface, about particular people in particular emergencies; she sketches their past and she gives, in the final chapter, her correspondence with them after she had left the USSR. This method of personal observation and the interview seemed to her more likely to reveal the new life in Soviet Russia than any study of documents, or direct investigation of "institutions and policies". But owing to the literary skill and shrewd discrimination shown in the life stories which she reveals, I find incidentally graphic accounts of the political and economic organization of Soviet life as she experienced it during her two years of residence in the USSR, from 1932 to 1934. To give only one example: her vivid account of the conference of collective farm chairmen called by the director of the political section of a machine tractor section—

P. 173. "I hurried back to Plavsk from a nearby village, expecting to find fifty-five half-frozen chairmen thawing out after long rides across the snow. Instead I found Natashin sitting before the microphone in the little broadcasting room at the telephone exchange. He

was interviewing the farm chairmen—but they were all sitting snugly at their telephones in villages scattered miles out over the frozen steppe.

"It was a 'wired broadcast' using radio equipment and the telephone network. Each listener could talk with Plavsk and each could hear what all the others said.

"Behind Natashin half a dozen men, wearing earphones, were listening intently: several members of the Plavsk Executive Committee who were also to broadcast; three agronomists; and a representative of the Commissariat of Agriculture who had arrived that day on an inspection tour from Moscow. Each was jotting down suggestions to give Natashin and names of lagging farms which would require a personal visit next day. . . . "

There follows revealing reports of the failure and success of the different collective farms. How strange it sounds to those living under a capitalist system that the director of the political section does not hesitate to tell the members of a successful collective farm to send a brigade with their own sled to give a helping hand to an unsuccessful collective farm. "He'll never get ready for the sowing if we don't help him." The answer comes immediately "I'll do that, Comrade Director"; and so on.

Not that everything is perfect in the USSR or even tolerable. There is a devastating account (p. 336) of the battle between the would-be collective farmers on the one hand and the superstitious peasants and the hostile Kulaks on the other—

"The president of the collective slept with his gun beside him in a different friend's home every night, evading the men who had sworn to 'get' him if he did not quit trying to organize the herdsmen. His Ukrainian wife, a fighter such as one finds not seldom among peasant

women on the steppe, backed him up. She kept a loaded gun beside her own bed, determined to fight to the death those richer herdsmen who would not let the poorer ones work together.

"The chairman, his face gaunt from overwork and restless sleep, told us bitterly: 'There is no Soviet power yet in the Caucasus.'"

In this vivid way the author of this book tells you the secret of the eventual success in the USSR in its planned production for community consumption. Under Soviet Communism there is no enemy party: there are no landlords, no capitalists, no moneylenders. For instance, the General Council of Trade Unions, who take an active part in state planning, and are the supreme authority for settling wage rates, know that the amount set aside by Gos Plan each year for wages and salaries will be estimated according to the past productivity of the workers by hand and by brain. The collective farmers know that the more grain and other crops supplied to the government, at a fixed price, the larger will be the output of consumable goods and the greater the extension of the social services. Hence the trade unions and collective farmers have started what is called "socialist competition"; each individual in each concern competes with other individuals and other concerns in seeking to produce more commodities for the wages received or the prices obtained. They are all equally anxious to use any method of remuneration, or to introduce any machinery, lessening effort and increasing productivity. What is even more surprising is the device of "patronage". If one factory has beaten another factory in the race for increased production, it is in honour bound to send its best men, and even provide machines, to bring the other factory up to the level of production. This sounds romantic. But as the amount to be distributed depends *on the total production during the past year of all the workers in all the plants*, it is in the interest

of each plant to increase the productivity of every other plant. That is obvious. And here we touch on the scale of values, the code of conduct, which inspires the planned production for community consumption. The dominant motive in everyone's life becomes, not the pecuniary self-interest of each individual, but the wealth and consequent well-being of all the people, all the time. For it is clear that every man starts adult life in debt to the community in which he has been born and bred, cared for, fed and clothed, educated and entertained. Anyone who, to the extent of his ability, does less than his share of work, and takes a full share of the wealth produced in the community, is considered a thief and is treated as such. On the other hand, those who do more than their share of the work that is useful to the community, who invent or explore, who excel in the arts and crafts, who are able and devoted leaders in production or administration, are not only provided with every pecuniary or other facility for pursuing their chosen careers, but are also honoured as heroes and publicly proclaimed as patterns of behaviour.

Thus, in planned production for community consumption, the secular and the religious are one. The good life at which the citizen aims is the life that is beneficial to all his fellow men, irrespective of age or sex, religion or race.

BEATRICE WEBB.

Passfield Corner, Liphook,
Hants,
June 1938.

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PREFACE

THIS IS NOT meant to be a book "about the Soviet Union". I have tried to write about specific people in specific situations, believing that the average reader will find their stories more interesting and more revealing than discussion of such abstract ideas as institutions and policies. The Soviet national policy can be made more real, it seems to me, by the story of one Yakutian charwoman who learns to read at twenty-seven and comes down from the Polar Circle to study in the Moscow Theatre School, than by whole chapters of generalization about Tsarist oppression and Soviet liberation.

Many of the people described are friends whom I have known since 1932, and with whom I have corresponded since leaving the USSR. Accordingly, I have been able to follow the development of these Soviet citizens over a period of almost five years, and to show in the final chapters how they have grown along with their country.

Life moves ahead swiftly in the USSR. The standard of living, in particular, has improved vastly since I lived there. My friends' letters, in the final chapters, bear eloquent witness to that fact. But people change much less rapidly, and it is about people and their development that I have tried to write. For this reason I am encouraged to believe that my book may have a value, even though many of the conditions it describes are already passing into the realm of history.

PART I

MUSCOVITES AT HOME

CHAPTER I

CUB REPORTER IN MOSCOW

IN THE PACKED Moscow tram it was hot and smelly. People were no longer individuals but arms and elbows sticking into their neighbours' stomachs, beards tickling their neighbours' necks, heads charging, shoulders wriggling through the mass of bodies to the front exit. Grunts of displeasure and sighs of relief followed each person as he moved up.

I was pressed tight against a peasant woman of fifty with several teeth missing. She had a thin body, thin face, thin nose. With her market basket she had nipped the stocking of the woman next to her, who wore a hat and a coat made of very good cloth. My neighbour had a shawl on her head, the almost invariable badge of the peasant or working woman.

Said the hatted one: "Be careful of my stocking! You're tearing it."

Said the shawled one: "I can't help it. I've got to carry the basket."

"Well," excitedly, "keep it away from my legs."

"Where can I put it? On my head?"

"Put it on your head!" spat out the city woman.

"Head nothing. Don't be so smart!" with considerable asperity.

"You shouldn't be carrying a basket on the tram."

"Oh, is that so? I have to go to my store.[1] They won't give me an automobile. Where do you want me to have my store? Right over the stove?"

[1] From 1929 (beginning of First Five-Year Plan) till 1935, the country was on food rations and purchases were made almost entirely in "closed" stores to which one had to have a pass.

"I don't care where you have your store!"

By this time everybody in the tram was beginning noisily to take sides.

"You're a 'baba'," ejaculated the woman in the hat. Literally, baba means country-woman, but used as a term of opprobrium it means a common, vulgar female.

"What do you mean, baba?" shrieked the peasant woman. "I'm no more a baba than you are! You put a hat on your head and think you're a lady."

"My hat doesn't cost as much as your shawl!"

"What do you know about the cost of my shawl? You're no lady!"

"You're a 'Sukharevsky' baba!"[1]

"You probably know a lot about Sukharevsky," said the old woman scathingly. Approving laughs from that part of the crowd which had sided with her followed this last sally as she grimly pushed herself and her basket to the door and got off.

None of the restrained politeness here that distinguished street-car altercations at home. It was open and everybody took a hand.

On another car that day I was struck by the uninhibited curiosity of my fellow-passengers, the unabashed friendliness with which I was asked what in America would have been "none of your business".

A buxom red-cheeked girl sitting next to me admired my raincoat, felt it between her short chapped fingers, and asked how much I paid for it. Somewhat taken aback, I replied:

"I got it in America. Prices there are different. I don't know how much it would cost in rubles."

"Oh, America . . . think of that!" Awed and eager, she forgot about the coat. "That's a rich country, they say. Why did you come away?"

[1] Sukharevsky market was Moscow's largest and noisiest public market, a hang-out for drunks and thieves, the dregs of society. Not long after this incident, it was closed.

I decided that such a solid, broad-cheeked girl with little blue eyes and uptilted nose must be a peasant, even though she wore a beret on her head instead of a kerchief. She would not understand, I thought, if I told her I was tired of an atmosphere in which women talked only of clothes and men, and the men were dilettantes. So I said:

"There are so many raincoats to choose from in America, you get tired of looking for them. That's why I came away. I was beginning to feel like a clothes-hanger."

She looked at me in utter amazement. Incomprehension struggled with suspicion. Then she lowered her eyes and half turned away while a red flush spread out to her neck. She thought I had been laughing at her. Contrite, I touched her on the sleeve.

"What I meant was there isn't much else to do in America except look for clothes. It's dull there, nothing interesting to do."

"With us it isn't dull," she replied, reassured.

She thought a while, then:

"You must be rich to travel?"

"No. I work for my living."

"Your family must be rich?"

"No. My father's a doctor who works for his living."

After a while she returned to the questioning again, trying to place me.

"Are you a Communist?"

"No. I don't know much about politics."

"I'm not a Communist either but I'm studying Marxism-Leninism in a class at the factory. Are you studying?"

I could not let her get ahead of me. "Not yet," I replied, "but I'm going to."

She worked in a big candy factory, earned a hundred rubles a month and a bonus whenever she turned out more than the required minimum. She paid ten rubles a month for her bed in the corner of somebody's room and ate all her meals in the factory restaurant. She could read but she wrote badly.

"But I'm liquidating my illiteracy," she said in the poster phraseology of the day. "How can I get a better job unless I raise my qualifications?"

"What made you come to Moscow?" I asked.

"It was dull in the village," she said, repeating my phrase. "The peasants are backward and 'dark' (benighted). Here there's lots going on—every night something else to do. Here they're going ahead! I want to go ahead too!"

It was time for her to get off. She took hold of my hand in a tight grip. "Good luck, my dear," she said.

. . . . .

For five days the idea had been growing that I wanted to stay. Moscow with its brilliantly coloured church domes and lacy crosses etched against the sky, its crooked cobbled lanes and, at night, a sliver of moon poised between two grotesque bulbs of St. Basil's Cathedral was beautiful and strange—everything the travel folders had promised.

But with my smattering of college-learned Russian I could get more than that. Conversations on the streets and in the trams were tantalizing. Everything was everybody's business, whether it was the bad manners of tearing a neighbour's stocking, or the Five-Year Plan. At home most of my friends felt there was little or nothing worth doing. Their lives were bounded by their own business or professional success, which they saw in a vacuum unrelated to anything else.

But here an unskilled factory worker thought she had to study political economy so that she could go ahead with her country. . . . And everyone talked about "our construction . . . , our agriculture . . . , our cultural development. . . ."

. . . . .

Jobs were easy to get. Moscow was full of jobs without people to fill them. The difficulty was getting a visa—permission to stay.

It was the summer of 1932. Foreigners were flocking into the country. A German garage mechanic, without the price of a return ticket, arrived with his wife and child and everything he owned in two battered suitcases, because he had "heard there were jobs here". Big Finnish-American lumberjacks, having spent their life-savings to buy sawmill equipment, brought it as their contribution to the Workers' State. They told you in broken English when you met them clumping down the hotel corridors in hobnailed boots: "We tink American machines good in Karelia."

Tall blond Britishers, who had dabbled in Communism at Cambridge, came to see it in practice. A Communist tailor from Rome pointed to the red flag illumined over the Kremlin at night and told you, with tears in his eyes, how his brother had died for the World Revolution. Many like me, intrigued by the travel folders' pictures of Moscow's golden domes, looking neither for jobs nor socialism, hoped to find a new zest for life in a colourful new country.

All of us needed rooms, but Moscow bulged already with three times as many people as it could accommodate. Some were willing to go to the provinces, but one had to wait weeks to get a railroad ticket because of the overloaded transport system. All of us had to eat, but Russians, laying the groundwork for an extensive industry, were on food rations. We were a problem. Unwillingly, the Russian authorities had raised the barriers to keep us out.

American old-timers in Moscow advised:

"Get a job. Convince some organization it can't get along without you. Then it will ask the foreign office to give you a visa."

So it was not just a job I was after when I went to see Michael Borodin, editor of the *Moscow News*. It was a chance to remain in a new world.

Borodin, six years earlier, had been that almost mythical figure known in news dispatches round the world as the Soviet adviser to the Chinese revolution. China, for the time being, was lost to Communism. Borodin had become

there a memory of hope or fear, in Moscow a forgotten man, in books the world over an imagination-stirring figure whose mission was ahead of its time. Vincent Sheean describes him well as one who, from Olympian heights of knowledge and understanding, maintained under all circumstances the "long-range view".

No one approaching Borodin could fail to be struck by him. Large, handsome, silent, dignified, he looked like a man of history. Not even the white linen jacket rumpled from the heat and open down the front, exposing some inches of black hairy chest, could make him anything but impressive.

Slowly he turned and looked at me, listened to my request for a job, rumbled through his black moustaches:

"Do you know Russian?"

I answered yes, not bothering to explain how scant my knowledge was.

Whereupon Borodin, not to be troubled by the little things, turned me over to the red-moustached managing editor. That worthy waved his hands like a flustered mother hen about to protect her brood, and introduced me to Anna Louise Strong. She, of the pink cheeks and white bobbed hair, nodded as she flew by and shoved me into the arms of the city editor. He, locked behind his desk in a room full of typewriters and noisy women, could not get away in a hurry, so he took time to talk.

"How would you like to do some translating?" He produced a copy of *Izvestia*, checked a few items and turned back to the story he was writing.

My Russian was stale and the translation was bad. The city editor looked it over, eyed me without enthusiasm, and asked how I would like to try reporting.

"Fine!"

Pulling a sheaf of bulging notes out of his pocket he said wearily: "Down the street three blocks away is the Medical Workers' Trade Union. There ought to be a story in it. Go down and see what you can get."

Knowing nothing about trade unions and little about

Russian verbs, I went out, thinking to make up with ingenuity what I lacked in knowledge. The trade union head was not interested in ingenuity and I came slinking back. Faced by a dearth of reporters who knew any Russian at all, the city editor sighed and gave me an interpreter —Tobias.

Tobias looked like a nervous man hunting for an address he could not find. A pair of wild blue eyes shone through his glasses, his dull brown hair stood out in strange wistful wisps all over his head. His badly fitting collar and worn tie set off a face that roused both curiosity and compassion.

He had a three days' growth of beard. His baggy trousers were held up by a thin strap pulled tight round his skinny waist, his badly-ironed shirt gaped where the buttons were missing. In my cool blue dress and white hat I was painfully aware that Tobias and I were a most incongruous pair.

But he was animated and unconcerned. He told me about his mad aunt in America and about his cousin who was a musical genius. He himself had lived in New York for eight years. There he had contracted "nervous stomach" on the starvation diet of an unskilled and often unemployed factory worker. Only since returning in 1924 to the Soviet Union's wholesome black bread had he felt right.

In the interview, instead of interpreting, Tobias nonchalantly changed my questions and interpolated his own. He gave the doctor a lecture on trade union developments in America, refusing to be led from the subject till he had finished. When we emerged and I exploded at his "nerve" he calmly interrupted:

"You know, you should get a book and study up on the social structure of the Soviet Union. You don't know much about it. I'll take you to the International Bookshop and help you pick one out."

Whereupon he took me by the elbow and steered me toward the bookstore, expounding en route the relative advantages of industrial and craft unions.

At the store, among books in Tartar, Uzbek, Ossetian and a dozen other strange tongues, we found volumes in the European languages and I bought two. That night and many nights thereafter I studied facts and theories behind this new world of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. I brushed up my Russian and dispensed with Tobias' services as interpreter. Till the day I left Moscow, however, I continued to be the recipient of his valuable and sometimes unsolicited advice.

. . . . . .

Next day I was sent to a machine tool plant to talk to an American worker about the problems of foreigners. I ran into a problem in the making.

A thirty-five year old German stood at his lathe in the big shop, making eyes at the red-kerchiefed girl who worked the next machine. Not content with her hasty smile, he left his motor whirring and stepped over to talk to her. A second later the Russian on his other side leaped across, shut off the power and launched into such a scolding as only a Russian can give.

"You fool! Can't you see you're spoiling the machine when you go off and leave it running? Is this child's play, do you think?" He pointed to his feet with a grimy forefinger: "How long do you think I've worn these torn shoes so we could buy this machine? Maybe in your Germany you can treat a machine like that, but not here . . ."

The shock-headed German, seeing the crowd gather, aware perhaps that his Russian was inadequate for such a situation, clenched his fist and landed it squarely on the Russian's jaw. Before the latter could retaliate, the other workers had grabbed him and led him off. Surly and silent, the German returned to his machine.

Clearly the matter could not be left unsettled. At noon the trade union met, with the German and the Russian attending.

"Send him back to Germany," said the more wrathful.

"Make him write an apology in the wall newspaper," said the more temperate.

After considerable debate the union passed the following resolution:

"Our German Comrade struck Ivanov because he did not understand the justice of Ivanov's words. Ivanov was right. We have bought these machines with our own sweat. It is not right that anyone should treat them carelessly.

"We hereby declare that Comrade Schultz, coming from a capitalist country, does not realize that this property belongs to us and that we must guard it with all our might. We conclude that Comrade Schultz must liquidate his political illiteracy by beginning at once to attend political classes."

That satisfied the Russians. If Schultz were willing to learn, all would be forgiven. The chastened Schultz said he was willing and the matter was settled.

In the flower garden in front of the factory I saw an old woman at work. She was sitting on the ground, lazily pulling weeds. She had on the usual kerchief, full skirts and blouse of the Russian peasant but she wore shoes instead of "lapti" (woven sandals of birch bark), a sign of more prosperous times.

Her hands were caked with dirt and her face shiny with perspiration. She pulled a weed and looked up for any excitement that might come her way.

A youth passed with a cigarette between his lips and she smiled at him.

"Give me a draw, Little Dove." He handed her the pack and she grabbed for a cigarette, apologizing in mock dismay when she discovered it was a good brand. But she took one, nevertheless, and gave him a cheery smile as thanks.

To the next passer-by she had something else to say.

"Can you tell me the time, Sonny?" Sonny told her the time and then added, slyly:

"What do you want with the time, Auntie? Happy people don't care what time it is. You're not worried about getting your job done, are you?"

She laughed and continued her desultory digging. Heaven knew when she would finish. It was like so much of the other work going on around Moscow—slow and inefficient. The wonder was that any of it got done. But people seemed gay on the job.

. . . . .

A Communist of high standing who had lived many years in America as a political refugee, looked at me kindly over his glasses when I talked with him. He warned me not to be too optimistic about what I had seen.

"We're doing great things in our country. To make the people conscious that everything belongs to them is a tremendous achievement. But we've got a long way to go yet. One must be able to see the spots in the sun."

I answered that if I were to see the spots in the sun I would have to remain. He agreed, and wrote a letter to Borodin recommending that he ask for my visa. Two other such letters and one from Borodin were sent to the Commissariat of Labour. I followed them a day later, impatient to learn what would be done about me.

At the Commissariat a woman whose nerves had been worn thin by foreigners with glib tongues cut short my explanation of how valuable I could be to the Soviet Union. Most foreigners, she said, were not nearly so valuable as they thought they were. She pulled a card out of a file.

"Now here's an example. This man says he's a first-class plumber, carpenter, garage mechanic, and an experienced man on textile machinery. All these are trades we need terribly. But do you know what he really is? A barber! !"

Her voice dripped with infinite disdain. "We've got plenty of barbers.

"Do you blame us for not wanting to give visas? They demand better rooms, better food, better conditions in general than our own workers. When they do something we

need and can't get here, it's all very well. But when they just pretend . . . !"

She pulled out more cards. I agreed that some foreigners should not get visas; between murmurs of sympathy, I assured her that I was different. When I phoned the next day she said briefly:

"You're all right."

That settled it. I flew from the telephone. "I've got a visa! I've got a visa! I'm going to stay!" The office force gathered around, everybody congratulating, approving. A college professor from Seattle who was having "visa trouble" looked at me enviously. I tried to cheer him up, feeling too ecstatic at the moment to understand anybody else's worries.

That very afternoon I received a cable from my father: "Position offered". I knew the job he referred to. Three months before I had been most anxious to get it.

Earlier, when I had thought of remaining in Moscow, it seemed to me the choice would be exceedingly difficult. A job at home meant comfort, getting along in the world I was used to. Working here meant sleeping in other people's dining-rooms and having nothing to take back with me when I left except experience. Would it be worth it?

But today I did not even think. I went dashing over cobblestones. I leaped mud puddles through the dusk to the telegraph office. I argued with the clerk who thought Los Angeles was in Central America, and sent my message.

"Remaining here love Seema."

CHAPTER II

OLD RUSSIAN SUBJECT—YOUNG SOVIET CITIZEN

"YOU'LL HAVE TO sleep in a dentist's office—but still it's a room." The friendly soul at the *Moscow Daily News* scribbled the address on a piece of paper and I went to look at it.

Through a gate in a high wooden fence I entered a dark courtyard tucked between two tall buildings five minutes' walk from the Red Square. Passing under a vaulted archway into a still deeper, smaller courtyard, I rang the bell under the sign: "Mikhail Ossipitch Limonosov, Assistant Professor."

The assistant professor was not at home. Nor was his wife, the dentist. Nor was their daughter Elena, to whom I would have to give English lessons if I wanted the couch in the dentist's office.

All this I learned from Marfusha, the sixty-five-year-old house-worker, smiling and bobbing her kerchiefed head at me under the hideous green-beaded lampshade in the dining-room.

Would I come again? I said 'yes' and resolved I would not. The lampshade, the grand piano covered with seamy black oilcloth, and the pungent odour of summer garbage drifting in through the window, seemed at that moment too much to accept even for the privilege of staying in Moscow.

But only at that moment. Though new buildings were going up everywhere and extra stories were being added to old ones, all the rooms had been assigned months in advance. I tramped the cobblestones for a week and ended up with a chance to share a basement room with a one-eyed woman and her husband and dog. My requirements became more

modest. I returned to the dentist's office with dread lest the room be gone.

It was not. The Limonosovs did not do things in a hurry. The tall, slim, grey-haired assistant professor smiled behind his eye-glasses, introduced me to his wife and retired. She looked me over with quick dark eyes, asked in rapid succession where I came from, what was my social origin, where I worked, why I had come to the Soviet Union, what my parents thought of the venture, and how long I expected to stay. Running out of breath she called shrilly for Elena.

Elena emerged, plump, fifteen and a little shy. Prompted by her mother, she assured me that she really did want to learn English. There being nothing else to do then, the mother showed me the room I was to share with her daughter.

I could not be particular. As soon as I made sure there was a bed I said "very nice", and asked how soon I could move in. Alarmed by my abruptness the lady dentist exacted a promise that I would leave if and when the Limonosovs found my presence undesirable.

"Evictions are so difficult," she sighed. "You can imagine how disagreeable it might become for us."

I could imagine. What if I insisted upon entertaining my friends when Elena had to do her homework. Or, still worse, suppose I let one move in with me to share the bed. Too many Moscow housewives had had this harrowing experience. And a city ordinance prohibited evictions during the winter months. Generously Emilia Feodorovna, the dentist, extended to me the privilege of dispensing with them (and their room) whenever the arrangement became undesirable to me. With this exchange of courtesies the matter was settled.

For two weeks I phoned daily to inquire whether the bed had been sufficiently purged of bugs. Then, though it had not, I moved in.

The bed was a narrow oilcloth-covered couch from which the sheets slipped every night so that by morning

I would be sleeping on its cold, bare surface. Under the bed were my three suitcases, typewriter, laundry bag and the pair of shoes I was not wearing. Next to it stood the dental chair whose head-rest is comfortable when one's mouth is open for an extraction but distinctly not so on purely social occasions.

Then in turn around the whitewashed walls came the dental cabinet from which there emanated all the sweet disagreeable odours peculiar to dental offices; Elena's little desk with the bust of Lenin; her chaste white bed with the blue silk coverlet. Behind the door were three hooks for our clothes. Then came a monstrous green washstand, whose tank Marfusha filled every morning, and beside it a tiny table for me with a chair pushed under it. This left just enough room for Elena and me to stretch our arms when we dressed—if we did not stretch the same way.

A double window, almost as wide as the room itself, proved a disappointment. A six-story building kept the sun away. Worse still, the window had to be locked tight every night, summer and winter, because we were on the first floor and petty thievery flourished in this period of scarcity. There were no screens. Screens were a refinement of which the Russians rightly said: "We're not up to that yet." Sometimes a very progressive family would stretch cheese-cloth across the windows to keep out the flies. But the Limonosovs were not progressive.

The dental equipment had been moved into the room after the revolution. Except for that there were few changes in the Limonosov household but the changes made by time itself. The gas heater in the bathroom, which must at one time have worked, was broken. Now the bathtub was used as a storage bin. The family and I bathed from a ten-inch wash-basin with water heated on the kitchen stove.

I met worker-families in Moscow living much better than they had before 1917. I met one-time bourgeois families

living much worse. But for the Limonosovs, life was the same.

Professor Limonosov had no political views. He had not sabotaged by refusing to work under the Bolsheviks in the early days of the revolution and consequently he escaped the harassments that befell some of his colleagues. As a scholar he was entitled to more rooms than the ordinary citizen in order that he might have solitude for study, so none had been taken from him. His wife's sister in America sent them a few dollars each month with which to buy food and clothing difficult to obtain then for Soviet currency. They lived as they had before the revolution.

The assistant professor's greatest interest in life was skin diseases. Next to that he loved opera and Elena. He walked quietly, his head bent forward, his kind grey eyes lost in contemplation. Passing through the dining-room on the way to his study, he would smile gently and thrust a newspaper at me.

"Seema Simeonovna, have you read about the opening of the new hospital in Odessa?" He would wait till I agreed it was very fine.

In his quiet unobtrusive way he was proud of the progress being made in his country. He did his part, working in a clinic and spending long hours with medical students so that the Soviet Union might have more and better doctors.

For physicians the revolution was a boon, he said.

"Now medicine is a science. We treat those who need care and the government pays us. Before, it was a business. If the patient had the money to buy, we sold him our services. If he had no money, he went without—just like shoes or theatre tickets. Disgusting!"

Unlike the doctor, who was never visibly excited, his wife was always a-flutter about something. Rarely, however, about new hospitals or a bumper harvest. Her chief interests were now, as before the revolution, her child, her household, and her friends' troubles.

Other people talked about their work. They became interesting even if they were not so otherwise because they knew much about some phase of Soviet life. Not so the lady dentist. She worked seven hours a day in a dental clinic but she never talked about it. This did not signify any particular lack of enthusiasm for her profession. She was simply the kind of person who reacted to what was thrust upon her immediate attention and promptly forgot everything else.

She scuttled quickly about the house in flat-heeled slippers, her slightly protruding dark eyes always expressing surprise. Now it was the lateness of the hour, now it was Elena's stubborn refusal to keep up her German, now it was a friend's quarrel with her husband as relayed over the telephone. I suspect her greatest worry was the indifference of her busy, matter-of-fact Young Communist daughter to the frills which were important in her own middle-class girlhood—party dresses, courtesy calls, and pretty manners.

The lady dentist was often thoughtless, not because she was selfish but because she was absent-minded. She chased me out of bed so that she could treat a patient one day in midwinter when I had the 'flu. When I climbed weakly back, shivering with cold, she leaned over me solicitously:

"You're apt to get pneumonia if you don't take care of yourself." She thrust a thick Russian thermometer into my armpit and shook her head sadly, anticipating my untimely demise and my father's grief when he learned of it.

She ran into the kitchen to tell Marfusha to cook me a good nourishing soup. A minute later she had forgotten all about me and my prospective pneumonia. Through the clatter of kettles and spoons I heard her shrill voice.

"You didn't buy the herring! Why didn't you? There won't be any left now! I've *told* you and *told* you not to come back and ask me about it when there are herrings at 1.20 rubles a kilo. Oh, Marfusha, what am I to do about you?" she wailed. "You never seem to learn!"

Marfusha's low rumbles accompanied the high staccato, till her employer pulled on her hat, grabbed a shopping bag and went off to rectify Marfusha's mistakes. She came back pleased as a child and pulled the herrings out of the bag like a magician showing his skill.

Mistress and servant were a good match—the first scolding, the second grumbling. Neither paid much attention to the other's complaints; each in her own way accepted the other's foibles, as she had for twenty years.

Marfusha was the more interesting of the two. She was illiterate, ignorant, religious, superstitious, shrewd—the typical old Russian peasant woman not one whit changed by the revolution. She had been a servant for forty years, half that time with the Limonosovs.

The revolution had long since abolished the term "servant" and had, to a large extent, abolished the mistress-servant relationship. Domestic employees are now called "house-workers" and protected by a trade union which regulates hours, wages, rest-days, annual vacation with pay, etc.

But only the old word described Marfusha. She never took her free day, never went on a vacation. Except for the church, she had no life outside the Limonosov household and no interests outside the family. And church she attended many times a week, anyway. Though she probably had enough money stowed away under her mattress to keep her the rest of her life, it did not occur to her to leave her job.

There was something wrong with her feet, so her employer did most of the shopping. Marfusha hobbled heavily about in a blue cotton dress with full skirt and long sleeves, making beds and sweeping. A little stooped with her sixty-five years, she would stand patiently in the dark kitchen filled with fumes of leaking gas, making delicacies to tempt the appetite of her adored little Elena. In her free moments she would sit in her airless cubby-hole off the kitchen, drinking endless saucers of scalding tea, or on

holidays, watching the candles flicker under the ikons in the corner.

I used to come into the kitchen to talk to her.

"Oh, Seema Simeonovna," she would say, sadly shaking her old head in the white kerchief. "If only you could have seen Moscow before the revolution—lots of fine churches—beautiful priests—beautiful stores. For two rubles you could buy lovely material for a dress. Now——" She grunted disparagingly: "Look at these potatoes!" She held up some miserable specimens.

"Soviet potatoes—humph—it's a punishment from God."

"It's a punishment" was her way of summing up any major or minor misfortune. When the soup boiled over she would mechanically say, as she took it off the stove: "It's a punishment."

Out on the streets the boys and girls would pass singing lustily and Marfusha would grumble: "Soviet children—rowdies—it's a punishment."

When somebody fell sick she would rush to church to pray for him, then come back and stand over the stove with tears rolling down her wrinkled cheeks into the soup. "It's a punishment."

"All my life I saved money to go into a convent in my old age," she told me one day. "Now I'm sixty-five and there are no convents. It's a punishment."

She looked at me speculatively with her shrewd little eyes and let me in on her conception of the truth.

"The trouble with Russia is this: Stalin likes foreign perfumes, spends all our money on perfumes. That's why things are bad. God punishes all of us for his sins."

Only God knew where that idea originated. She got it probably from some equally benighted houseworker in the queue. Such people were the bulwark of ignorance and superstition, the "dark people" of old Russia.

Marfusha was open in her criticism of everything Soviet. Standing in queues with other houseworkers she would

complain of the high price of meat and shoes and bewail the evil days that had come upon Russia.

Nobody paid any attention to her. It was more or less recognized that old people like Marfusha could not understand the sweeping changes that had come over their country. All over the city there were classes for housework-ers, organized by their trade union, but Marfusha stubbornly refused to have anything to do with that "Soviet invention", the union. And she had never heard Lenin's pithy tenet: "Learn, learn, and learn."

But one day as she stood waiting her turn to buy kerosene she loudly maligned the "—— Jews, who cause all the trouble in this country". Anti-Semitism, or any form of racial prejudice, is a punishable offence in the Soviet Union. A militia-man (Soviet policeman) who passed at that moment, took her by the arm and led her off to the station.

Marfusha was scared. She told them where she lived and sat nervously crossing herself till her mistress arrived.

"Marfusha! What do you mean by making a scandal in the street?" said that nervous lady, bursting through the door, her cheeks flushed with excitement and annoyance. She turned to the militia-man.

"She's just an ignorant old woman. She doesn't know what she's talking about. She's lived with us—a Jewish family—for twenty years. After all, what can we do with her? She's harmless enough. She wouldn't hurt a fly."

Turning again to Marfusha:

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Here I come home from work and instead of resting I have to run to the militia to get you out. What! Are you a child? It's time you knew better."

So, on the plea of her Jewish employer, the charge of anti-Semitism was dismissed and Marfusha went home to mend her ways.

Marfusha was new Russia's heritage from the past. Elena was its investment in the future.

Clear-eyed, clear-thinking Soviet youth, untrammelled by superstition and ignorance, girded with confidence in their own powers and the knowledge that everything they can think and do is needed by their lusty young country, they march forward to reap the fruits of their fathers' sacrifices, not realizing that they themselves are its greatest fruit.

Elena was fifteen. She liked ice-skating, opera and geology. She hated fussy dresses, her mother's tendency to exhibit her before friends, and her bourgeois piano teacher who wrung her hands and sighed dramatically when her pupil did not know the lesson.

She had brown bobbed hair combed back off her forehead, thoughtful hazel eyes, a few freckles sprinkled across her nose and softly rounded pink cheeks, a quick smile when amused but a serious mouth and an exquisitely moulded chin.

Except in the dead of winter she wore half-socks and went bareheaded. After she had fastened a leather belt round her slim waist in the morning to hold her blouse in place, and folded her socks neatly down over her ankles, she was dressed for school, theatre, stroll or whatever the day and evening might bring.

The great difference between her and American schoolgirls I had known, was that she was always busy and that she was so self-sufficient and independent of her parents.

School was the pivot of her existence. It lasted from one o'clock till seven in the evening, the second shift, necessitated by over-crowding. Scholastic standards were high and she spent most of the morning doing her homework. She belonged to the Komsomol or Young Communist League, and often attended meetings after school. She had as her "social work" (volunteer service to the community) the job of coaching a backward member of her group. Not infrequently she went with her class to some museum.

She was one of a committee which went each week to a small furniture factory in the neighbourhood to help

the workers get out a shop paper. In exchange the factory made benches for the school cafeteria and props for dramatic productions, contributed to the school's summer camp fund and sent delegations of workers to inspect the school.

The school had a similar arrangement of "mutual patronage" with the Bolshoi Theatre, the Soviet Union's finest opera.[1] I could never discover what the students did for the theatre but the Bolshoi supplied the school generously with tickets to reward good scholars. I often envied Elena because she got for nothing tickets I could not buy even though I stood in line weeks in advance.

Elena spent her summers at the school camp in the country, doing an hour or two of light work each day on a neighbouring collective farm and putting on a few pounds and a coat of tan for the long Moscow winter.

Small wonder that she had never an idle moment and invariably replied when her mother asked her to go visiting: "I'm too busy to go gadding about on social calls."

Part of her self-sufficiency came from the fact that her parents were occupied and their working and eating hours did not coincide with hers. The only time I saw the whole family together for an evening was when they were deciding what series of season theatre tickets they should buy. That was common business important enough to draw each one away from his individual activities.

But mainly her independence was developed by the early opportunities for leadership and self-expression given Soviet children in school, camp, and club.

They were taught they must learn well in school in order to qualify for jobs that awaited them. They knew they were needed in a country which, they were convinced, was leading the world towards socialism and freedom for all

[1] It is customary in the USSR for one institution to "assume patronage" over another and to extend aid in the form of materials, men, ideas, encouragement. Under this "big brother" arrangement, a Moscow factory sent mechanics to help repair collective farm machinery and the farms sent as a gift potatoes for the factory dining-room; our publishing house bought books and musical instruments for a Red Army regiment and the Red Army boys invited us to their camp for a holiday and taught us how to ski.

men. I know of no better way of developing confidence and independence than by teaching children they are needed.

Elena had a hard time understanding any world except her own. She returned from a visit to the Tolstoy Museum one day much excited. She had seen the desk at which the great writer worked, his simple bed, some of his manuscripts. She was as impressed as any Tolstoy devotee could be. But when I asked her how she liked *Anna Karenina*, which she had just finished reading, she replied:

"Not very much. Women like Anna Karenina don't exist."

She was both intelligent and imaginative, but she could not conceive of a woman so involved in a love affair as to give up everything else in the world. The reason was not only her youth. On the screen, in the newspapers, and in the life around her were women who worked. They had many interests outside themselves and their loves. Moreover they were too busy to cultivate tragic love affairs even if they would.

Nor did Elena understand Marfusha, any more than the old woman understood her. She took Marfusha for granted. And that good believer in the church worshipped the ground the young atheist walked on.

They were arguing one night about the efficacy of prayer. A friend of the family had just sent a present to Marfusha because the latter had said prayers for her six-year-old daughter, ill with pneumonia. Marfusha not only remembered the girl in her prayers but had paid to have her name inscribed in a book in the church so the priest would pray for her too. The girl recovered.

Elena, the Komsomolka, said heatedly, her face flushed with zeal:

"All your prayers wouldn't have helped a bit if they hadn't taken good care of her!"

Marfusha, believer in prayer and the Tsar, tenderly smoothed the pillow of her darling as she put it into place

on the bed. She replied with a warmth of conviction that would have discouraged a less determined adversary:

"You don't know, little Elena. Prayer helps a great deal. I feel it helps me."

"All your *prayers* and *priests*—" said Elena with infinite scorn.

Marfusha drew herself up in the doorway, superiority and disdain all over her wrinkled face.

"Your Stalin!" she spat out venomously, and disappeared into her sanctuary behind the kitchen.

CHAPTER III

"THE WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' INSPECTION FOR LITERATURE"

THE LITERARY CRITIC Kolya picked up *The Evening Moscow* and read aloud to his wife and me, seated over a late supper.

"All of this aimless strolling must be done away with. 'Stroll with a Purpose!' That should be the slogan of the strollers. Collective strolling is what we need. Comrades should assemble in disciplined groups, form in lines one behind the other and walk briskly, with chests out, heads high, inhaling great lung-fulls of fresh stimulating air. Purposeless individual strolling has no place in socialist construction. Strolling with arms round lovers' waists must be quashed. Down with lovers' arms——"

Kolya's eyes gleamed behind the thick glasses.

"Well, it's a bit laboured for a satirical effort, but the idea is all right. Some of our self-righteous citizens take it upon themselves to lay down the 'correct ideological approach' to any 'problem', even to diapering the baby."

Kolya was one of the most feared literary satirists in Moscow. Just as M——, a leading Soviet satirist, laughed at the pompous solemnity with which many petty officials still viewed the "new life", so Kolya ridiculed the "stuffed shirts" of the literary world who revealed the same "ideological approach" to every minute detail of daily life.

And there was no lack of targets for his barbs. Swiftly mounting literacy had created an insatiable demand for reading matter. Editions of books were sold out the first day on the stands. But this had made the problem of hack writing acute. Kolya's stinging pen pointed out trash to the public and taunted the writers to better efforts. Only

five times in the eight years he had been in Moscow had he praised an author.

"They'll stop publishing you some day," warned Tamara, his attractive wife. "All those men who are your friends because you haven't yet criticized them will turn against you. There'll be no one to defend you."

"Oh, yes, there will be," Kolya replied quietly, breaking off another piece of sugar with the pincers.

"Who?" she challenged.

"The broad masses. I'm the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection for Literature."[1]

He continued, developing a thought which began as whimsy and ended in seriousness: "I defend the people from the literary charlatans. They won't desert me for it."

We laughed at the picture Kolya conjured up of himself with his trusty fountain-pen, holding off the pack of bad writers who threatened to envelope the masses in a flood of hack work.

Kolya's grandfather had been one of the wealthiest men in Tiflis, his father a successful Armenian physician. His mother had been educated in a School for Noble Maidens, a Tsarist finishing school. He came rightly by a taste for luxury.

He looked like the popular conception of a critic, slight, a little stooped, with thick glasses and an indoor pallor. His eyes had a half-cynical, half-quizzical gleam, and his quirk of a smile above the ridiculous little tuft of black beard on his chin, reminded me somewhat of a highly sophisticated cat, waiting, thoughtful and half amused, to pounce on the mouse that crossed his path.

He carried a cane and had unbounded admiration for foreign clothes. When he travelled he went first-class. If he could not afford that he stayed home. When presented to a woman he bowed over her hand and raised it to his lips in the manner of a more chivalrous age. And he liked

[1] Workers' and Peasants' Inspection was, at that time, one of the principal agencies of citizens' control over public administration.

the type of woman created by leisure and wealth, the kind that was charming, amusing, and well-dressed.

One of Kolya's uncles was a high official in the Commissariat of Internal Affairs, his only brother an ardent young Communist whose one desire was to help build socialism. Kolya's thinking, quicker to change than his habits and tastes, was as much in tune with Soviet life as theirs.

I once asked him why, since he was entirely in sympathy with the Soviet system, he did not become a Communist. He confessed, like many others, that he was not ready to make the personal sacrifices and assume the responsibilities involved in party membership.

"I want to write. But you know the Communist Party puts men to work where it needs them, not where they want to be. In a country developing as fast as ours and so short of men as we are, that has to be. But what if I should join the party and be sent down to Central Asia to manage a cotton plantation? I'm interested in literature. Here I can read everything some new author writes and show him where he's not good enough for a nation learning to grow cotton."

He finished, as usual, in jest. Kolya's literary talents would never have been wasted on cotton growing. But he might have been appointed editor of some literary magazine or given a position of similar character which would have left him no time for the work he wanted to do. So he remained a critic and what is known as a "Sovietski chelovek"—"Soviet person", a non-Communist supporter of Communist policy.

. . . . .

Kolya's wife Tamara was a Jewess whose father had fled to America when she was a baby, to escape exile in Siberia as a revolutionist. Her mother married again and Tamara was brought up in the Greek Orthodox Church by her Russian engineer stepfather. She was twenty-eight when I

met her, a striking woman with a generous supple figure, the embodiment of health and energy. Her grey-green eyes were set off by the glossy black hair which she wore tied in a knot at the back of her head. She had a robust sense of humour which was a good foil for her husband's subtler wit.

Before she married Kolya she had studied singing in the Tiflis Conservatory. At sixteen she had tramped through remote valleys of the Caucasus with a woman botanist, collecting specimens and learning the songs and customs of half-civilized mountain tribesmen. Later she had worked at a hydrographic institute and in 1931 she had gone on a scientific expedition to the Arctic. She enjoyed the work and the adventure but to continue it would have taken her away from her husband and son, so she gave it up.

When I first knew her she was leading a quiet life at home, helping Kolya with his manuscripts. She was one of his staunchest admirers, but occasionally she would object that his critical articles were too biting. Sometimes it was just in fun.

"You make a lot of trouble for your wife. The other night I met R—— at a party. He danced attendance on me, brought me tea, told me what beautiful eyes I had. Then he discovered whose wife I was. He knows how you ripped his novel to pieces in your review for the *Literary Gazette*.

"He grew pale—he'd had a drop of cognac already. He clutched his brow and moaned—like this," Tamara clutched her handsome brow in mimicry.

"I didn't know what to do for the poor young man. So I said you barely mentioned him. 'And besides,' I told him, 'he referred to you only by implication, not by name. And I don't think what he said was very apropos. And anyway, the review won't appear till next week.'"

She laughed at the recollection. "It's embarrassing. You cramp my style terribly."

But at times she was serious when she told Kolya

restrain himself. Not every editor accepted his articles, for often he attacked writers whom other critics were currently praising. Kolya's earnings, like those of all "creative" workers, writers, composers, actors, inventors, etc., were high compared with those of ordinary citizens. Still they were lower than those of many of his literary friends. In her weaker moments in the difficult year 1932–33, Tamara sometimes sighed about the hardships of "poverty."

"It's degrading to be concerned with such trivial things as how to get butter and where to buy a bed-spring. For instance, that miserable bathtub of ours. For months we've wanted to have it repaired but the neighbours won't chip in and we can't afford to have it done ourselves."

Plumbers and plumbing fixtures were scarce when the country's tremendous building programme absorbed every man and every foot of pipe. Five families, who shared the kitchen, toilet and bath in the house, could have paid for the repair job. But not all were convinced of the need for bathtubs. They went to the public bath once a week or bathed in a basin in their rooms, as I did. Until they all saw the need for a tub in their house, Kolya and Tamara would have to do likewise.

Kolya had good news for his wife this time. He reached for an electric iron on the side table and replied:

"Cheer up, darling. When I get this iron fixed for Korsakova she'll do anything I ask. Nobody else would tackle it. She's the third to be won over. There remains only Drushkin, and since he's a great admirer of yours, I think you can persuade him."

Tamara patted his cheek, restored to her usual cheerfulness.

"Good. Seema, you're invited to come over every free day and take a bath in our tub."

. . . . .

Kolya and Tamara had been married eleven years and divorced five years. When they arrived in Moscow from

Tiflis it turned out that Tamara could get a room if she were single but if she were married she must share Kolya's. Since they had a child and wanted two rooms, they got a divorce. They had never bothered about being "registered" (i.e., married) a second time.

"You've got to hunt for this district's registry office," Tamara explained when I asked her why she did not become legally married again. "You know how much trouble that is. Moscow offices are always moving." She patted the dark head of her nine-year-old son, a Kolya in miniature. "I guess Kolinka is as good a marriage certificate as I need."

Yet theirs was a successful marriage, more than most I had seen in the Soviet Union or in America. Tamara typed her husband's manuscripts and appreciated his wit. She served him cocoa in bed in the morning after he had worked till dawn. He admired the skill with which she searched out ridiculous passages in new books for him to laugh at and periodically he scoured the town for an electric tea-kettle or some other small luxury with which to delight her. Together they entertained, with cognac, American dance records, and sparkling conversation, a group of writers, artists and motion-picture people, the "literary intelligentsia" of Moscow. Afterwards they uncomplainingly ate black bread and tea for breakfast because there was no money after a party with which to get anything better.

But rarely did Kolya and Tamara go out together. When he rose in the evening from his after-dinner nap he shaved, knotted his tie so the worn place did not show, and asked Tamara how he looked. Then he would put his cane over his arm and leave the house alone.

"He's an 'Asiatic'," Tamara once said, explaining what seemed to me singular procedure for such a fond husband. She referred to his Tiflis origin. "He likes his life and his wife apart. When we first married we used to spend our evenings together with friends. But he was bored. So was

I. For years we have had our own friends and found our own entertainment."

Kolya went most often to Shingarev, the literary critic, for an evening of 'shop' or general conversation. Rarely did he go to the theatre, the delight of most of Moscow. He thought most new plays not worth seeing and his interest in the old ones he had exhausted the first years in Moscow. Once a year he went to the Park of Culture and Rest, where the masses enjoyed themselves. But for the most part his own circle provided him with sufficient stimulation and relaxation.

Tamara's tastes were more catholic. She went to parties, concerts, and, occasionally, to the theatre. In summer she went rowing on the river. More often in the evenings, she stayed at home reading. She liked to read Pushkin's poetry to her appreciative young son and some time always had to be spent dickering with him to wash his neck before he went to bed. She was a well-adjusted, self-sufficient young woman, to whom an evening alone presented no problems.

Tamara had men admirers and Kolya had women friends. In earlier years they had doubtless had their pangs of jealousy. But Time and the conviction that neither owned the other had gotten them over the difficulties.

A chance comment of Tamara's on a forty-three-year-old bachelor friend of hers led us into a discussion of Soviet and bourgeois marriage customs. The friend was a charming, well-educated man, holding a responsible (and well-paid) post. Witty and handsome, he had seemed to me to be a very "eligible" bachelor. But Tamara said of him:

"Leonid is lonely. What a shame he didn't marry when he was young."

"But 43 isn't old," I protested. "In our country a man of his age and position would be considered quite a catch."

"Ah yes," she replied. "In your country a man of 43 has had just time enough to acquire wealth and position.

With that he can offer a wife economic security and an established position in society. And your young men are not able to marry because they can't support a wife.

"But with us, where a man can always get a job—and the wife too—people marry young. And a man of 43 here can't buy a wife the way your successful middle-aged bachelor can, with the promise of a life of ease, social prestige and so on. In fact, for a wife to lie around and do nothing here brings social disapproval instead of prestige.

"It's unsocial not to work where labour is so badly needed. And besides, it's dull sitting at home. One of these days I shall tell Kolya to get another assistant and go out and find myself a regular job. There's so much going on. You miss a lot if you stay home."

I objected that there were still Russian women with undeveloped social consciences.

"But they have a hard time finding what they want among the Russians. You see them around the Hotel Metropole and the National, where the foreigners are. They don't want Leonid and he wouldn't have them. Parasites are not desirable here."

"But we have many women who work after they are married. Parasites are undesirable in America, too, in many circles."

She interrupted me. "I read in the paper yesterday that in some large city in America all married women were being dismissed from teaching jobs. It's what your capitalist economics does to the independence of women. They've got to be parasites whether they want to or not, because there aren't enough jobs to go around."

"And is marriage such a success here?" I asked. "Look at the number of divorces."

"Yes. Because people get married only when they care for a person. They stay married because they wish to, not in order to be supported or to have a position in society or because they fear public disapproval if

they separate. Since there is no outside compulsion, the marriages that exist are successful ones."

. . . . .

Thirty-five-year-old Masha, with a trim figure, potato nose, and a half-dozen suitors, was a "houseworker" who knew her own worth. And in Moscow, where every day hundreds of houseworkers were leaving the kitchen for the factory, she had to be handled with gloves. Her occasional bursts of temperament, usually following a quarrel with the current suitor, were overlooked by her employer.

One morning Masha, face flushed, burst in from the kitchen and confronted Tamara crossly.

"Why should I make your husband's cocoa? Whose husband is he, anyway? Why shouldn't you wait on him?"

"Why, Masha! What's gotten into you?—Haven't you made his cocoa for three years?"

"Here I've a dozen important things to do. The sink's caking, we're out of kerosene, Mishka's run off devil knows where after some little bitch——" (Mishka was their noisy little "white" Spitz dog.) "And what do you do?" Her voice dripped infinite scorn. "Read books and jiggle that typewriter! Fine shape the household would be in if I weren't here to look after things." She sniffed. "He's *your* husband—you ought to wait on him."

Tamara concealed her amusement and soothed the prima donna. "But, Masha, I type his good-for-nothing articles and laugh at his jokes. Isn't that enough for one woman? We've each got our cross to bear—didn't they teach you that in the nunnery?"

Masha grumbled a bit more, worked off her ill humour, and went back to the kitchen, mollified, to make the cocoa.

She had been a novice in a nunnery before the revolution. But the holy sisters would probably have been much distressed if they could have seen what I chanced on one evening; Masha, silhouetted in the kitchen doorway, was sending away some unlucky suitor. He was evidently

reproachful. Arms akimbo, nose in the air, Masha told him with superb hauteur:

"I'm not interested in your quite unnecessary remarks, Citizen. I give my love to whom I please!"

Nevertheless, when Sunday came she rarely failed to go to church. For this occasion, she always put on a gleaming white kerchief in place of the week-day blue or red one.

I was curious about her attitude when one of the house-workers sharing the kitchen became pregnant. The girl had no husband. She could have had an abortion and few would have been the wiser. But she wanted the child.[1]

I asked Masha what she thought about the girl's conduct.

"She's foolish to want to raise the child alone." There was no moral problem here for the one-time novice brought up in a village where a "fallen woman" was shunned. "And she isn't even going to make the father help support it. But if she wants to have it, it's her business."

Masha thought marriage was all right for those who liked it. She did not. Like a few other peasant women I met she wanted to avoid the yoke of husband and children. Too often she had seen it make peasant women old before their time.

Like most Russians, however, Masha was very fond of children. Months before her vacation she began buying presents for her nieces and nephews in the village. She was always making special tit-bits for Tamara's ruddy-cheeked son Kolinka. When in an especially good mood she would take him to church with her.

. . . . .

Church was to Masha a habit that had little influence on her daily life. To Kolinka, it was a rich and colourful spectacle.

[1] No child is considered "illegitimate" in the Soviet Union. In 1933 abortions were performed readily in government hospitals.

At nine, he had already the makings of an actor, and the drama of church ritual delighted him. He liked the priests' robes and mystery of chants and incense and candles flaming in dark corners.

I asked Tamara if she was not afraid the boy might be won over to religion.

"No. Everything at home and at school and in his Young Pioneer group shows him what a hollow sham the church ceremony is. It is sometimes good theatre, of course. But there is much better theatre in Moscow, and we take him often."

I often found Kolinka in the back yard, decked out in an old curtain or wearing his father's new cap, directing a theatrical performance. He would marshal a half-dozen playmates ranging from three to ten, drape them in their mothers' cast-off dresses and teach each his part in turn.

He confided to me one day with a troubled frown that his biggest production problem was getting actors big enough to understand what he said but not so big that they wanted to run the show themselves. Like directors of all Soviet enterprises, he struggled with "insufficient cadres". But he succeeded more or less in reproducing bits from plays he had seen at the Children's Theatre or scenes he created out of his own vivid imagination. He always took the stellar role himself, of course, and played it with remarkable skill and feeling.

Kolinka's mother one day told me a story illustrating the difference between Soviet and American social standards.

It was in 1932, a year when clothing of good quality was almost unobtainable. The results of the First Five-Year Plan were barely beginning to be reflected in increased production of consumer's goods. Wearing apparel, both men's and women's, was simple, often drab, and utilitarian considerations far outweighed the aesthetic.

So it was that when Kolinka's handsome mother visited school one day, wearing a string of coloured beads to match a pretty cotton print dress, she stood out in marked

contrast to the other mothers. Somewhere in the room a child whispered "bourzhuika" (bourgeois woman). Kolinka's cheeks flamed. He looked out of the window, away from the accusing eyes of the other children.

"He was ashamed of me, this precious son of mine," said Tamara, teasingly ruffling his hair when she told me about it. "He thinks I'm too well dressed, a real bourgeois."

Kolinka squirmed but remained silent. It was just what he did think.

CHAPTER IV

"IN TIFLIS THE SUN IS WARM"

"IN TIFLIS THE sun is warm. The hills rise high all around, like the sides of a teacup, and the city sleeps at the bottom."

Thus Tamara described her native city, exotic Tiflis between the Caspian and Black Seas in the sun-baked land south of the Caucasus range . . . ancient mecca of merchants on the trade route between Europe and Asia.

Somewhere in a magazine when I was ten I had seen a picture of Tiflis. I had forgotten the picture, but its exotic flavour came flooding back when she pronounced "Tee-fleece".

Kolya, it seemed, was going down to visit his mother. Would I care to go along? I looked doubtfully at Tamara. In America a respectable young woman might well hesitate to start on a two weeks' journey with her best friend's husband.

"You ought to go," she urged, "Kolya knows the town and dozens of people there. It'll be interesting with him."

It was the end of January in Moscow, thirty below zero. For a couple of months I had not left the house without fur coat, fur cap and felt boots. Tiflis promised adventure and sunshine.

I did not have the money. But money, so easily spent, was easily borrowed in Moscow. I could repay it with what I earned on stories mailed from Tiflis. So I collected some debts, accepted a couple of loans, and the last day in January Kolya and I were off.

Not, of course, before Tamara and Masha had spent two days preparing food to take along. Even "first-class"

did not guarantee a diner in 1933, and it was a four-day journey to Tiflis.

Two days south-bound through central Russia, over endless snowy steppe terrifying in its emptiness. Not a live thing on it except an occasional sled crawling like a black speck towards a white horizon. Now and then we passed a village marked by a massive bulbous-domed church overshadowing the frightened little huts that huddled around it as though to turn their backs on the vastness all around.

Further south the ground turned brown—and camel caravans moved slowly across the Azerbaizhan desert. We skirted the edge of the Caspian Sea, a strip of green-white ice beyond the rosy sands—then back into the mountains, up, up, up. At two o'clock of the fifth morning we skimmed over the rim of hills and dropped down into the luminous cup that held Tiflis.

The taxi-drivers had wearied of waiting for a train that was ten hours late. But the patient porters were there to carry luggage on their backs.

One of these, a dark-skinned Kurd in soft leather slippers, approached us, carrying the padded frame which is the badge of his trade. He stooped over, making of his back a flat surface on which a comrade placed the frame. On top of this he piled three heavy suitcases. A rope was run over them and across the porter's shoulders into his tight grip. Then he asked us where to go and trotted off, nose to the ground.

These typical Tiflis beasts of burden transported everything except grand pianos, an indication of the economic backwardness of the Caucasian capital. It was not uncommon to see one of them carrying an enormous wardrobe, scaring everybody out of the way as he walked in the gutter but perfectly steady on his own two legs.

We followed the porter over the cobblestones, through lamp-lit narrow streets, past dark houses with shutters drawn for the night. In the daytime these streets resounded

to clanging street cars, creaking dusty ox carts, and the curses of mountaineers driving their hardy little burros to market. But we heard only our own footsteps and saw only one lone reveller gingerly weaving his way home between the shadows. We reached our destination.

Kolya's mother lived in a faded mansion on Clara Zetkin Street in one of the fourteen rooms that had once been her own. She was a little grey-haired lady with a tinkling girlish laugh and the luminous dark eyes common among Armenians. First she fed us. That is always the first stage of welcome in Tiflis, which knows all the subtleties of hospitality. Then she took a lamp and led me to the balcony and around the corner to a cold bare room that had been the pantry in her house.

"I'm sorry I can offer you so few comforts," she apologized gracefully. "But as you see, I have only one room. A neighbour who's gone on a visit let me have this for my guest."

I double-bolted the door against robbers, according to her directions. Then fighting hard to keep thoughts of intruders out of my mind, crawled into the neighbour's hard bed and fell asleep.

Lydia Nikolayevna, Kolya's mother, had been described by her fond daughter-in-law in these words:

"Here's the difference between my generation and hers. I asked my best friend what she was most afraid of and she answered 'pregnancy'. I asked Lydia Nikolayevna what she was most afraid of in the world and she replied, 'draughts'."

In her big room, crowded with handsome wardrobes and beautiful old china, she had secured herself against draughts. And what other discomforts it held were apparently disregarded. Here was a woman who seemed to have no regrets for what she had lost.

She had come from one of the wealthy families of Tiflis. Reared in luxury, educated at the "School for Noble Maidens", she became, when she married, mistress of many

servants and a carriage of her own. The revolution had taken her wealth. Each morning now she bargained over the price of meat on the market-place. She stood in queues on the street to buy kerosene. She spent hours cooking, on the miserable little one-burner stove, delicious Caucasian dishes flavoured with herbs she painstakingly gathered on the Tiflis hills.

That story of lost splendour I had heard a hundred times since coming to the Soviet Union. But this was the first time I met a heroine who did not grumble about her fate. Lydia Nikolayevna adjusted herself as gracefully to her new surroundings as she had adorned the old.

She was sixty and in poor health. But she had not lost the delightful sense of humour I had seen in Kolya and now recognized in her. There was not a drop of bitterness in her, nor of regret for her golden past. I could not help comparing her with old Marfusha, whose past held nothing of beauty but was recalled with many laments.

Lydia Nikolayevna's spinster sister, who shared the room, eked out her earnings as a seamstress by selling the splendid dresses she had cherished since her youth. She was considerably less serene than Kolya's mother. But she had always been a doleful creature and nobody paid much attention to her. She had hopes of making up for this world's ills in the next. Every Sunday and religious holiday she tied her bonnet under her sallow chin, put on the faded brocade coat which dated from the year of the revolution, and journeyed to church to fortify her faith in the hereafter. That practice, Lydia Nikolayevna, like her children, had long since abandoned.

. . . . .

Tiflis was a new world to me, just as Moscow had been six months before. It nestled compact within its hills while Moscow sprawled on an endless steppe. Tiflis was brown and sunny and warm while Moscow was cold and dreary under its blanket of snow. On the main street of Tiflis,

named characteristically enough for the Georgian poet Rustaveli and not for some hero of the revolution, a dozen strange nationalities in native dress strolled or lounged before the wineshops.

There were Tiurk women with gold rings in their ears and layer upon layer of gay skirts swishing their bare feet —Moslem women with black scarfs held across their faces —little old Armenian ladies wearing the traditional black cap with white frill in front and false brown curls at the back.

Georgians in tight-waisted coats and cartridge-pockets across the breast and flat-topped fur hats, the typical costume of the Caucasus, swaggered jauntily down the boulevards. Many of them had daggers dangling from their belts. Others wore European clothes topped off by picturesque white Arab turbans. Beak-nosed porters, sitting on their haunches in the shade of downtown buildings, waited for someone to come along and give them a job.

In front of the Rustaveli Theatre we met the director and three artists engaged in what appeared to be idle chatter in Georgian. Kolya knew him, so we stopped to talk.

"How sociable!" I observed when we had gone on.

"That wasn't just 'sociable'," Kolya replied. "That was 'business' as you Americans say. He was telling them how to improve their acting and they were repeating their lines. In Moscow it would be done in the theatre. Here it's done in the street, where the sun shines.

"That's the way they do things in Tiflis . . . 'by the way', offhand, casually. Have you noticed the way the tram-cars amble along here as compared with Moscow? Nobody's in a hurry in Tiflis."

Even on the stage one saw, not the struggle for a socialist society commonly depicted in the Moscow theatre, but the old romantic loves and bloody feuds of mountain tribes of the Caucasus.

Nowhere did I see evidence of "tempo", efficiency, action, industry, so constantly forced upon our attention in the north. Tiflis strolled and sipped its wine in the old-time way. Beside it, Moscow, slow enough to foreign eyes, seemed the capital of a teeming industrial empire.

This was not so true as it seemed, of course. A few hours' ride from lazy Rustaveli Prospect, men were building a giant electric power station, factories, new towns and socialist health resorts. Mines were being dug in the mountains and rivers harnessed to run factory wheels. In Baku one of the world's richest oilfields was producing fifteen million tons of oil annually. Behind the doors of the one-time Tiflis school for Noble Maidens, previously unlettered mountain tribesmen were learning the mysteries of scientific agriculture. The Commissar of Communal Housing for Transcaucasia, whom I went to interview, was too busy to see me until eleven o'clock at night. When I left him at midnight he returned to his work.

All this one found if one looked under the surface. On the streets life was the same as it had been before Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaizhan united their warring destinies to become sister republics in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.[1]

What delighted the visitor in Tiflis was the "colour". The wheel of an ancient floating water-mill, moored in the river ten feet from the city's busiest bridge, turned with the current, grinding out flour as it had for two hundred years. Up in Maidan, 'Asiatic Tiflis', where narrow flat-topped houses clung to the steep hillsides, women leaned over balconies shaking rugs over the heads of passersby and shouting pleasantries to their neighbours in a dozen strange languages. In a climbing narrow street given over to their trade for centuries, dyers stirred their steaming cauldrons and hung out great bunches of bright wool to dry.

In the market-place merchants loudly bargained the price of Caucasian daggers, rugs, herbs and goatskins of

[1] Each of these is now a separate republic of the U.S.S.R.

delicious home-made wine. Their Russian was voluble and fluent but, from the grammarian's point of view, far worse than mine.

Stopping on a narrow bridge to admire the blue and orange mosaic mosque in the centre of Maidan, I was nearly run over by a caravan of asses driven by a mountaineer in homespun suit and home-made sandals. He left them sleepily standing on the street while he went into a tea-shop to sip tea out of his saucer and talk with his friends.

. . . . .

I went one evening with Vera, Kolya's sister, to one of the old Maidan bathhouses, built over mineral springs. Outside, where the warm water trickled from the baths into the river, a dozen Kurd women were doing their washing. With brilliant red and purple and yellow skirts tucked up over plump bare knees, they squatted, swishing the garments back and forth, keeping up a lively chatter and gay laughter that never stopped for a second.

In the bathhouse the lights had gone out, as they did all too often that winter. New factories were using electricity faster than new power stations could generate it. The attendant led us by candle-light to two spacious rooms with sunken tubs. Warm mineral water gushed from the pipes, fresh from mountain springs which gave Tiflis its original name of "Tbilisi".[1]

"You can take an hour. After that you're taxed for every five minutes extra," the attendant said, slamming the door as she left us. The demand for baths had increased faster than new bathhouses could be put up. One bathed "by appointment". But for the Commissar, who interceded for us because I was a foreigner, we would have done without, for bookings had to be made three weeks in advance.

The "rubber" knocked and entered, a handsome brown Kurd woman who slipped a kimono off her shoulders and stood naked except for the scarf round her heavy hair.

[1] Tiflis has since had its old name restored, and is now known as Tbilisi.

We did not know her language and she did not know ours. So with a shrug of the shoulders and a smile, she grabbed my arm and fell to work. First she scrubbed with a rough fibre mitten, then she poured several buckets of soapy water over me. Then she pounded and rubbed till I groaned. She revived me with more buckets of water and left me gasping on the stone bench, with a pleasant warm glow pouring through my body and a pleasant relaxation seeping into my soul.

Afterwards we sat cooling off in the corridor, eating tangerines and watching new bathers with bundles of clean clothes arriving with friends, wives, or alone. Husbands and wives, it seemed, bathed together, but otherwise mixed bathing was forbidden. (Why they were so strict, I could not understand, since rubbers could be of either sex. The wedding-ring, imperfect enough symbol of the marriage state, was rarely worn here, just as it was not worn throughout the Soviet Union. But Tiflis women were modest and reserved, in the tradition of the east, and infringements of the custom were unlikely.)

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Despite her Armenian ancestry, Vera had the attributes of what is regarded as a typical Georgian beauty—an oval face tapering delicately to a pointed chin, large almond-shaped eyes, somewhat prominent nose and small mouth. Her eyes were grey, as are many in Tiflis.

With all the requisites for the Persian-miniature beauty that characterized Georgian women in more leisurely times, Vera did not seem beautiful to the casual observer. Her eyes were tired, her nose shiny, her fine mouth marred by a defective tooth. Her clothes fitted badly and her hair was often dishevelled. With the responsibility of a job, a child, and a household, she had neither the time nor the money with which to take care of herself. Occasionally she regretted that fact aloud, usually she had no time to talk about it.

Vera's husband was an Armenian named Gregori, a colourful figure in his home town of Tiflis. At fourteen he had run away from home to join the Tsar's army. His recklessness and daring in raids across the German Lines won him several mentions in despatches. He came home three years later in a gorgeous uniform with a string of medals across his chest.

When the revolution came, however, he turned his back on the gorgeous uniforms and joined the ragged Reds, fighting desperately for control in Transcaucasia. The comrade who had persuaded him to "fight the princes" was killed, but Gregori stayed with the army. When the Civil War was over and Georgia, which had changed governments a dozen times, came under the rule of the Bolsheviks, Gregori was a tested member of the Communist Party.

When I met him he was coughing his life away in Tiflis, after years spent travelling up and down the Soviet Union, supervising the supply of kerosene to factories, from Siberia to the Polish border. His handsome eyes were feverish, his cheeks sunken, his skin muddy. Long silences marked the periods between his brilliant flashes of wit. With the recklessness that characterized him he had refused to do anything to regain his health. His comrades had urged treatment in a tuberculosis sanatorium on the Black Sea. He waved them aside, saying:

"Give me the sun of my native town and I'll get well."

A year later, on his deathbed in Moscow, he shot himself with the revolver he had carried for twenty years, asking only that his ashes be laid in a Tiflis grave. No Communist comrade followed his body on its last sad journey. Gregori had shown himself unworthy of being a Communist by succumbing to weakness and committing suicide.[1]

Tamara declared then that Gregori was a victim of his own "Asiatic" fatalism—the belief that what will be will

[1] When the circumstances became known, however, his widow and child were given the modest pension which the party customarily assigns to the family of a member who has died.

be, and nothing can change it. This was a strange conviction for one who adhered to the Communist doctrine that by changing economic conditions the very nature of man can be changed. But in his personal habits Gregori, who had devoted his life to the Communist cause, had not changed.

When he was home, Gregori was the absolute ruler in his household, though his two sisters were older and his younger brother a Communist with presumably the status of comrade. The women were no dependent creatures in an eastern harem. Vera, his wife, was a librarian in the agricultural University, housed in the former School for Noble Maidens. One sister had a responsible position in the state bank and the other was a physician supporting her two children. They all contributed to the common household. But it was Gregori who decided when it was time to go to bed, which rug to buy, when to send the children to the country, when to have guests and whom to invite.

He arranged a typical Georgian dinner for my instruction. Except for me, who as a foreign woman had special privileges, only men were invited. Georgian women were rarely called to social functions with their husbands. The women of Gregori's household who had made all the preparations for the dinner ate with us, but they neither drank nor joined in the conversation.

A Georgian dinner with a Georgian toastmaster is a memorable event in one's life. Delicately seasoned sausages melt in one's mouth. There is rice with savoury morsels of meat—cheese pancakes—tender steak with potatoes and a sauce flavoured with herbs blended according to recipes of generations of epicures. Such food would delight the palate in any country. After Moscow's tasteless meals it was a double delight.

"To the pretty little fingers that prepared the dinner," was the toastmaster's opening line. He held up a glass of sparkling wine. Someone brought in the servant whose gnarled fingers had cooked for three generations of Gregori's

family. The toastmaster tossed back his head and laughed, then raised his black moustachios towards the ceiling and poured the wine down his throat. We emptied our glasses with him. It was a breach of etiquette to do otherwise when the master-of-ceremonies had spoken.

Chief requisites of a toastmaster are a ready tongue and an endless capacity for wine. Gregori, himself a wit in great demand at Tiflis dinners, had chosen well.

In the most extravagant terms the toastmaster praised my bravery in crossing the ocean. Kolya leaned over to confide that the Georgian was subject to seasickness and hence much impressed by my travels.

he moustached-one continued: "It is said that one who has tasted the waters of our Kura River is bound to return. We hope . . ." And so on and on, flattery upon lavish praise.

He toasted Kolya, Gregori, other guests, children asleep in the next room and children yet unborn . . . our parents whose greatest joy was that no harm should come to us, Gregori's honoured mother who had recently died. To all but the last we emptied our glasses. To this we merely sipped the wine, joined for the only time by the other women. Each toast was accompanied by five minutes of flowery eloquence. I had good reason to remember the warning I had been given in Moscow, that a Georgian's "line" was beautiful but not to be trusted too far.

So for five hours we sat. Toast followed toast. Dry wine gave way to sweet. When the long dinner was over we continued to sit, nibbling fruits and cheese, listening to one tale after another by men who had fought through the "Imperialist War", the Civil War and the Intervention.

From reminiscences they turned to jokes, Soviet and anti-Soviet. The last were as popular among Communists as among non-Communists. Some I had heard in Moscow, where they probably originated. Others had a purely local flavour.

The toastmaster, a Communist, told us a story that sounded like one more fabricated joke but which he swore

was actual fact. The previous day he had been in the Tiflis Communist Party headquarters, when Stalin's old mother walked in, a simple, unworldly woman with a black kerchief over her head.

"She went up to Comrade Zoriashvili and told him, with great feeling: 'I know you're an important man here in the government. I wish you could get my boy Joseph a job here. He's not strong. That Moscow climate is bad for him. I don't know what will happen if someone doesn't look after him a little and bring him back home.'"

CHAPTER V

TRAIN-TRACK INTERLUDE

THREE WEEKS OF Tiflis wine cellars and Tiflis dinners and Kolya became bored with his provincial home town. Work awaited him in Moscow. I, too, had overstayed my leave. So one afternoon, while the sun beat down on the station platform, we said good-bye to our friends and boarded a train for Moscow.

On the fourth day we were running on schedule, a fact which in that year was still something remarkable.

But at a village stop a mechanic put an end to my sense of well-being. Crawling under our luxurious "wagon lit" for the routine examination, he discovered that one of the springs had cracked.

Train-master, station-master, porters and passengers gathered in a knot in the snow to discuss the situation. There was much waving of hands and tossing of expletives into the air. Out of the commotion evolved our fate. Our car was to be unhooked and left for repairs and the rest of the train would proceed on its way. There were six places in the "soft" for anyone who wanted to make the change; we could take them or wait till the next Moscow-bound train came along and we would be "hooked on" and continue our well-upholstered journey to the capital.

"Moscow tonight for us," said Kolya and I. But by the time we had collected bags and boxes and packages of Georgian cheese for Moscow wives and Georgian wine for Moscow friends and gone staggering up the track to get into the "soft", the soft and hard and all the rest of it began to move, gathered power, and speeded away, leaving us standing there feeling cheated and utterly ridiculous.

A couple of hours later, with the hammering still going

on under the car, and the Moscow-bound train to which we were to be hooked nobody knew how many hours away, I wandered over to the station to see what I could see.

The big room was literally grey with humanity. Peasants were lying on their bundles asleep. Others chewed at dry black bread or soaked hunks of it in tea or milk which they bought from villagers who thronged to the station to meet every train.

Mothers nursed babies, with other children clustered around them, asleep. In front of the ticket window a line of peasants sat on the floor, waiting, with that infinite patience which foreigners cannot understand, for the ticket agent to appear. Another line moved in endless procession to the huge samovars at the end of the airless hall, filling the ubiquitous tea-kettles, without which no one travels in the USSR.

I was attracted by half a dozen peasant boys who trooped in, knocking the snow off their boots and pushing their caps back on their heads. One of them removed his threadbare mittens and began to blow on his hands. They edged close to look at the vermilion fountain-pen in my hand and we began to talk.

They were about fourteen or fifteen years old, homeward bound for the week-end from the teacher-training school in the town. I observed that they had gotten an early start in the profession.

"We'll finish all the sooner," replied one of them, a lad with delicate features uncommon in the Russian peasant.

Their fathers, they told me, "Plowed the soil", that is, farmed.

"And in winter?" I asked.

"Sleep on top of the stove."

"And your mothers work in the fields too?"

"Yes. 'He who does not work, shall not eat,'" one of them answered gravely, quoting the Soviet maxim.

The director of the teacher-training institute, making the rounds of the seven-year schools the previous spring,

had offered them places in his school. In the same way, they said, all but four or five of the hundred boys and girls in their graduating class had gone to some higher institution to study. Education and food and lodging at the school were free. Yet these boys were on food rations. One of their objects in going home, they told me, was to bring back extra bread and potatoes for themselves.

They were serious youngsters intent on completing their schooling and going out to teach other children. I forgot their ages when I talked with them. Each had the responsibilities and self-restraint of an adult. Born in civil war and famine, they were a generation marked by hardship, reaping already the cultural benefits of the revolution but not yet the physical comforts that were to come.

. . . . .

Late that night as I gazed out of the train window upon the snow and thought how terrifying it must have been to be marched in the terrible chain gangs across those trackless miles to the Tsar's Siberia, I was recalled to my surroundings by six-foot-two of Soviet youth standing in the doorway.

"Things like this don't happen in America, do they?" he observed, indicating the car stranded on the track. I had grown weary of the delay so I agreed with feeling that they did not.

"They won't here either pretty soon." With that he dismissed the subject.

"Where are you bound for?"

I told him and asked his destination.

"Stalinsk, in Siberia. Ever been there? No. Well, you ought to go. That's the place where life is boiling."

He shifted his long, lean frame easily, pushed the hair back from his forehead and thrust a brown fist deeper into his pocket for emphasis.

"Two years ago when I arrived, they pointed to a corner of a field and told me that was where my room would be.

Most of the town was like that—big open spaces where something was going to be.

"Now it's a city with 300,000 people, with phone and water systems and a tram line being built. We've got a good theatre. Not as good as Moscow's, of course, but it can't all be done overnight."

"What do you do there?"

"I'm on the paper—a daily. Before that I worked in Baku and Tiflis and Moscow. I was about to enter the University when things began to happen in Stalinsk and the Komsomol sent me out there. I like it." He went on telling me about the city that had sprung up "like a mushroom on damp pasture land".

He spoke well, with the easy eagerness of one who does not need to gesticulate or raise his voice to prove his strength. He had the earnestness one encounters in so many young Russians. It sometimes makes them too "heavy" for foreign tastes. But in him it was lightened by flashes of humour. When his mouth spread out in a smile there was all the fun and candour on his freckled face that one could find in the "typical" American boy.

He was twenty years old, he told me, and he had been working since he was fourteen. He had written a book, *Azerbaidjan Sketches*, and another called *Oil*.

"That one wasn't published, though. I'm glad of it. Upton Sinclair did a better job on his 'Oil'."

In response to my query, he ran down the list of American writers he had read. Then he began to quiz me. How did I like Dreiser? And London? And O. Henry? And Dos Passos?

"I'm writing a novel now. Been working on it for two years. It's about a young fellow of twenty in the Soviet Union." He flashed a quick grin, not pretending that the book was about anyone except himself.

"I had two friends when I was a kid. One went to America. He's attending a University there, going to be an engineer. He doesn't know a thing of what's going on in

the world of economics, politics, literature. All he cares about, according to his letters, is getting ahead in his field.

"The other friend went to Palestine. He was a Zionist when he left. Then he turned Communist in Palestine and was persecuted for his activities. Now he'd like to come back here.

"This novel I'm writing is about a Soviet youth," he repeated. "But it will show him and those others who are seeing life with such a different slant."

He was very matter-of-fact. Quite casually, when he finished, he offered to send me a copy of the book when it came out.

The conversation had run its course and he ended it as abruptly as he had begun.

"Well, I guess I'll turn in." He nodded good night, pulled his long lean self out of my doorway and disappeared down the corridor.

Outside it was dark and cold. The Moscow-bound train had not yet arrived and nobody knew how long we would continue to stand on the outskirts of that little village asleep in the steppe. I let my thoughts drift again to Siberia. New cities were growing up in the snow where prison gangs had rested on their weary march.

CHAPTER VI

PROPOSAL BY PROXY

BACK IN MOSCOW I spent a day describing to my creditors on the *Moscow News* staff the adventures I had had on their money. Then I settled back into the anything-but-dull routine of my job. My first assignment was the photo studio of the "Big Mostorg", Moscow's finest department store.

I wanted a story about a young photographer whom the critics were praising for his pictures of shock workers on the Dnieper Dam. I also needed a snapshot of myself, so I paid the fee and sat down to wait my turn.

Also waiting was an old woman with her head draped in black. I had seen such headdresses in Tiflis. They are made of a long veil wound around and over the top of the head with the ends hanging down and making a frame for the face.

Her face was wrinkled, her eyes brilliant and dark. She sat on the edge of the chair, her big-knuckled hands pulling together the front of a coarse, factory-made coat.

With her was a dark-skinned lad of fifteen wearing the cheap serge suit and brown oxfords with the pointed toes common on the streets of Moscow. They talked a language I did not know. When I took off my beret and began to arrange my hair, however, the old woman said to the boy in very bad Russian:

"What a pity she doesn't have long hair."

I continued combing my bobbed hair under her close scrutiny.

"Are you a foreigner?" she asked. Then she wanted to know my nationality.

"Are you unmarried?" When I told her I was she began to peer even closer with her quick, bright eyes. She said

something to the boy in her own tongue. I thought she might be a gypsy wanting to tell my fortune or snatch my purse. I picked it up from the table.

By this time I was completely mystified and a little annoyed by her obvious inspection. Foreigners get used to being objects of curiosity in the Soviet Union. The ordinary peasant or worker has few inhibitions. Anything he wants to know he asks. On the crowded trams I had often been asked my nationality, why I came to the Soviet Union, my views on Charles Dickens, how much I paid for my mittens, whether I was married, and so on. But this woman not only scrutinized and asked questions; she discussed my answers in a language I did not understand. This was carrying curiosity too far.

"What is it you want?" I asked impatiently.

Before she could reply the photographer poked his head out and called her into the studio. I turned to the boy.

"Who is she?"

"We're Tadjiks, from Tadjikistan. My grandmother's a member of the Communist Party. She's come up to Moscow to an All-Union Conference of the Women's Sector of the party. She's been very active organizing children's nurseries all over our republic. That's why they chose her to come here."

He was proud of his grandmother. He himself had moved to Moscow with his parents and his Russian, though marked by a foreign accent, was considerably better than the old woman's. I told him good-bye when I went in to be photographed, but when I came out he and his grandmother were waiting for me.

"You say you're not married?" She put her hand on my arm, looking up at me with her fine eyes.

"Why are you so interested?" I countered.

"I have a son," eagerly. "He's a doctor—a *big* doctor—down in Tashkent. I'm looking for a wife for him. You're a nice young woman—healthy—pretty. I think you would do . . ."

I began to laugh. The boy smiled sheepishly with me.

"Why doesn't your son look for his own wife?" I asked when I had recovered. "Perhaps he wouldn't like one you have chosen."

"Oh, my son is a very fine man," she assured me, completely serious. The implication was that a fine man would not question his mother's judgment.

"You could live in Tashkent," she urged, eagerly, stumbling over the Russian words. "Or he could go to America with you. However you wished, so it would be. You will come with me?"

I did want to go to Tashkent. But there were too many complications involved in this invitation. So I expressed my regrets and bade my would-be mother-in-law good-bye at the door.

I have no way of knowing whether she merely happened to like my looks and approached me in the customary way of her people, or whether she was motivated by the hope that I might take her son to what she thought would be a brilliant life in America. This last possibility is unworthy of a Communist. But obviously tradition had not given way entirely to Communism in her. I suspect it was my American passport that attracted her, as foreign passports and foreign privileges had upon occasion attracted others.

. . . . . .

The photographer I had come to see was a slight, sallow Komsomol of seventeen. He had the tired eyes one often found among the active younger generation in the Soviet Union, the sign of youth pushing itself beyond its strength. A red-cheeked boy and girl who had called for him stood with us, looking proudly at this comrade who was sought out by "the press". Thinking he might not speak freely before them, I suggested we go into another room.

"Oh, no," he replied. "We're Komsomols. We're used to doing things collectively." So we sat down for the collective interview.

"Photography should fix the epoch we live in." He told me his philosophy and showed me his pictures. They were excellent reproductions of the men and husky young girls who were building the world's biggest dam[1] and power station on the Dnieper river.

He studied the pictures earnestly, explaining how he got the roundness of that cheek or the perspiration on this brow that made them so remarkably life-like. His photographs of Komsomols were particularly good—he had caught the dauntlessness in their eyes, the expression of confidence in the future which is the most outstanding trait of Soviet youth. They looked strong and beautiful, worthy builders of a new society.

"I used to think a shock worker was a hero cut from a different cloth," said the photographer. "But now I know he's just an ordinary man. What makes him different from the others is that he's more honest in his work."

When he discovered I was from Hollywood he "interviewed" me about the motion-picture industry till he found I knew less about it than he. He had wanted to go to the Moscow Cinema School, he confided. "But now I think I'll get a job on the 'lot' somewhere and find out first what I can do. Maybe I'll discover I have no feeling for motion-picture work."

His friends were amused at the suggestion that he might not be good enough for the cinema. They were sure he could do anything he put his hand to. They put away his photographs as we finished talking. Then, proudly, one on either side of him, they took him off with them to a Komsomol meeting.

. . . . .

Loyalty toward their fellows is one of the chief characteristics of Komsomols, just as self-confidence is one of their main traits. Often such loyalty embraces a wider field and becomes complete selfless devotion to a "cause".

[1] When it was built the Dnieper Dam was the biggest in the world. It has since been superseded by Boulder Dam.

Kolya's young brother, Sasha, was an example of such self-abnegation. When he first came to Moscow he slept on the table of the Komsomol district headquarters where he worked. Finally somebody got him a room. When his sister-in-law learned about it two months later and went to see him she found him sitting on an ancient mattress on the floor. He offered her a box, the only other piece of furniture.

"But why didn't you tell me you had a room?" she said. "I'd have gotten some furniture for it."

"I've been too busy to phone you," he said. He and his friend were at that moment going over the plans for a district Komsomol conference.

I met Sasha first in the spring of 1933, a lad of twenty-four with a wilted cap on top of his dark head. He had just returned to Moscow from a village a few hundred miles away where he had helped organize peasants for the spring sowing. It was a crucial period in Soviet agriculture. Thousands of veteran Communists and young Komsomols had been sent from the cities to see that this decisive sowing was accomplished with speed and thoroughness. It had been done. Sasha's name appeared with others in the columns of *Izvestia*, the official government newspaper, as one of the young men who had made his district go "over the top".

He took that praise without a word. What he talked about when he came to see Kolya was the fact that he had been demoted from his position as secretary of the Komsomol organization of his district.

"I didn't do a good job at it. They're appointing my pal, Vanya, to correct my errors." He smiled candidly, without self pity. Good Komsomols pride themselves on their ability to take criticism. Sasha was a good Komsomol.

"What will you do now?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "Whatever the party tells me to do."

Before that he spent one evening at a Bach concert. I chanced to have the seat next to him and observed how

he sat entranced, shoulders hunched forward, eyes fixed on the orchestra, oblivious to everything except the music. Bach was a love a Komsomol rarely had time to indulge. Next day he was sent out of Moscow on another mission.

There are all degrees of this subordination of self to the general good. The young photographer and the journalist I met on the train from Tiflis were more common types. They were well aware of the social significance of their work but, at the same time, they were interested in developing their own talents.

Sasha's talent was the complete identification of his personal desires with the cause of socialist construction. Before he was born men had renounced wealth and wives and personal ambition to brave death and exile working for the overthrow of the old order. Sasha would do the same, if need be, for the upbuilding of a new one.

. . . . .

I went one day to get a story on the children's court.

The proceedings were conducted in a dingy upstairs room of the faded building housing the district court. They were presided over by a middle-aged woman psychiatrist. She was assisted by another woman specialist in juvenile delinquency, a young man from the Society for the Protection of Homeless Children, and a housewife of the district representing "the public".

The first "defendant" was a girl just big enough to look over the top of the table at her questioners. Two weeks before at school, without apparent provocation, she had suddenly pulled a knife out of her pocket and stabbed a boy. Nothing would make her talk about the stabbing or answer questions about herself.

Her delicate jaw was set as she faced the court, grouped informally around the table. Her soft sad mouth imperceptibly changed to a hard line. Her black eyes were expressionless in a brown, ageless little face.

"Come, Tonya," said the doctor. "Tell me what you've been doing since the last time I saw you."

The thin lips tightened a little more. Never did a mask more completely hide the face of an actor.

"Remember the pictures you drew for me?" The doctor held up a pad of drawings. Tonya's eyes settled for a second on the pictures. Her mouth became a little less firm. But repeated questions about where she had been and what she had been doing were met with silence.

"There's some psychological knot there that's got to be untied," murmured the doctor after she had been taken out. "She lives with a mother who can't understand her and a stepfather who is drunk most of the time. He begrudges her the bread she eats and tells her so. She steals and stays away from school. Sometimes she doesn't come home to sleep.

"She spends a lot of time at the circus—told me she wants to be an acrobat. Her mother says she's twelve years old but I think she's younger. We're supposed to get a copy of her birth certificate today."

The mother came in. She had brown skin and black eyes like the child and a weak mouth that trembled as she began to talk. Her tears spilled over.

"I wish you'd do something about her. I can't. Send her to a school or take her to a home."

The court decided to send the child to an institute for observation. Afterward she would be assigned to a sanatorium for special care or, if all she needed were wholesome surroundings, be put in a children's home.

I sat all day in the courtroom hearing juvenile cases. Between cases I talked to the judge.

The chief cause of juvenile delinquency, she said, was bad environment. "We talk to the parents, have classes for them where we try to educate them away from practices that provide unhealthful surroundings for their children. When the home situation is hopeless, as in Tonya's case, we take the children away. Such parents are usually glad to be rid of them."

Bad heredity, syphilis, alcoholism or prostitution in the parents were the next most frequent cause for trouble with juveniles, continued the judge. Definite physical, mental or psychological abnormality in the child was least often the cause of delinquency. Of the relative importance of heredity and environment she said unhesitatingly:

"Bad heredity may be a factor that gets a child into trouble when his surroundings are also bad. But the social environment is the determining cause. If that is good, heredity fades into the background."

There was a definite correlation, she said, between the functioning of schools in a district and child crime in the same area. A "good" school meant less delinquency in the neighbourhood. Education and re-education were taking the place of punishment in the treatment of delinquency, adult as well as juvenile.

A most unexpected incident occured to enliven the morning.

Two shawled women burst into the courtroom, one fat and stolid, the other thin and animated. Each held a bundled baby in her arms, both the same size.

"She's got two," breathlessly blurted out the animated thin one, tearing herself away from the attendant who tried to stop her at the door. "She wants to give me one. Where can I get the 'papers'?"

It developed that the fat stolid woman had given birth to twins. Feeling indeed that Nature had been over-generous with her, she magnanimously gave one of the babies to her thin friend who had never been blessed. All this we learned from the excited words of the adopting woman. The real mother merely nodded and smiled her agreement. She did not open her mouth except to explain complacently when the judge said the father's consent would also be required, that she did not know where the father was.

The thin woman did not have a husband.

"But I want a baby!" she retorted. When the judge asked her how she was going to take care of it she replied

with a gesture that swept away all such trivial considerations, "I'll take care of it all right. Where do I get the papers?" She pulled the patched coverlet away from the infant's face to smile fondly down at it.

Impatiently the judge hustled them out of the room to another office where the matter would be investigated.

"What does she need two for?" shouted the thin woman passionately as the door closed behind her.

The judge sighed and sat down. "If they'd only think a little before begetting children or adopting them we would have less trouble with them later on. But they're so ignorant! What can you expect of them? How much education our people need!"

CHAPTER VII

WITHOUT BENEFIT OF ORANGE BLOSSOMS

A FRIEND IN AMERICA once told me to be sure to have a church wedding when I married. "You'll have so much to remember," she said. Church weddings were not in vogue when I married in Moscow. Still, there is much to remember.

Neither Jack nor I had a room. And rooms were no easier to get than the year before when I arrived. I still had the dentist's office which I shared with Elena. Jack had a couch in somebody's dining-room that had been his living quarters since he arrived from America two years before.

The absence of a room was a problem long before we thought about marriage. One likes to have a place to sit down and talk quietly with even the most casual acquaintance. For us that was impossible. Even if Jack managed to dodge the head-rest and get more or less comfortably seated in the dental chair, my little room-mate would come home with lessons to get. Or a patient would arrive and drive us into the dining-room where five other members of the household were spending the evening.

We tried the gold brocade chairs that leaned against the marble nudes on the stair landing at the *Moscow News* office. But that was less private than Theatre Square. Someone was sure to lean over the stair rail and shout:

"Where's the cut that goes with your collective farm story?"

Or "Barnes just called from the Ball Bearing Plant. Wants you to help the foreigners edit a wall newspaper."

Or some member of the staff wanted to know if he could buy a pair of socks on your Insnab book (permit to buy in the co-operative store for foreigners).

Or the kitchen committee was about to have a meeting and wanted your views on whether the office dining-room should raise the price of salads and get good ones or keep the price where it was and be content with pickles.

It was still too cold for strolling. In America, home being impossible, we would have gone for an automobile ride. But only foreign correspondents and lucky shock workers owned automobiles in Moscow. Sleigh riding was a romantic alternative, but prohibitively high priced, and cold with the thermometer at twenty below zero.

A fuzzy old "izvoshchik" (cab-man) in huge skeepskin coat, ear muffs flapping in the wind, and frosted whiskers like a postcard Santa Claus, tried to cajole us one snowy night into taking a ride.

"Let's go," said Jack.

"Too cold," I shivered.

He took my arm and began, in fun, to pull me toward the sleigh. Across the street were three young fellows who, seeing us tussle, thought they were witnessing some of old Russia's brutality toward women. Everything is everybody's business in Moscow. One of them boomed out angrily:

"Hey you! Cut the hooliganism. Leave the girl alone!"

So Jack cut the rowdyism and we walked sedately home.

Not many restaurants were open in 1933. We had recourse to one on Bolshaya Dmitrovka one night when it seemed the most important thing in the world to have half an hour of uninterrupted conversation. A private booth was being vacated as we entered. Jack left me standing in the doorway, dashed out among the tables nearly knocking over a couple of waiters with hot soup, and clutched the curtain of the booth in triumph.

"But look, he's still got his overcoat on," declared the breathless runner-up, trying to have his competitor declared ineligible.

"Yes, Citizen," explained the head waiter, shaking his head sadly at Jack. "First you must remove your outer apparel and then get a place in the dining-room. It's uncultured to sit at the table in your overcoat."

At that moment I came up and said something in English. There was nothing about our appearance to indicate we were foreigners. We were both wearing felt boots, fur caps, mittens, and heavy, all-enveloping coats. But the language was unmistakable and the hospitable Russians go out of their way to make foreigners comfortable.

"Ah—foreigners," murmured the head waiter. He turned to our competitor for the booth and repeated impressively: "Foreigners! They don't know our ways. You've got to know how to handle 'em." Then, getting no response, he said sternly: "Citizen! The booth is taken. Go wait your turn." He shooed the disgruntled citizen away and bustled off to tell the orchestra to play an American tune.

We buried our faces in the menu, ashamed to have gotten the booth by pretending unacquaintance with Russian custom. But necessity knows no law, and we were sure the Russian, being alone, did not need privacy so much as we did.

The three-piece jazz orchestra swung into an old American favourite, "Who?" The fox-trot—"fawks trawt" to the Russians—was just coming into its own after several years of disfavour. But Russian jazz orchestras had not yet arrived. They reminded me of frisky colts, young and awkward, learning to frolic on still shaky legs.

Our café orchestra galloped through the number, bowed and smiled hospitably at us, and galloped through again, much pleased with itself. The din was so great that conversation was quite out of the question. We hastily finished our meal, sent up three glasses of vodka to thank the musicians for the all-American programme, and escaped into the comparative quiet of the cobblestoned street.

Life was simpler for us when it grew warm. We could stroll under the trees on the boulevards, or on the river's

edge, smelling the spring. Red Square,[1] beautiful under all circumstances, was enchanting under a spring moon with the white Kremlin palaces peeping demurely over the wall, and the grotesque bulbs of St. Basil's Cathedral looming up like a set for an Arabian Night fantasy.

On free days we could take a train to the country and walk in pine forests or swim in the rivers. Or, better still, board a boat to some sleepy little village down the river and, catching the last boat back, reach home in time to see the faint glow of northern lights change to milky dawn over Moscow's golden domes.

. . . . .

We were just becoming accustomed to Moscow's cobblestones and milky dawns when everything happened at once. A friend of Jack's went to Leningrad and bequeathed him his room, i.e. put in a good word with the owner so she would agree to rent it to him; and Jack's passport expiration date came due, necessitating, in the absence of an American Embassy in Moscow, a trip abroad to have it renewed. We decided to get married and, using the excuse of Jack's passport, take a trip to Berlin to celebrate.

Jack wanted to go by 'plane. But we could not get reservations till we had exit visas. I could not get an exit visa till I had permission from the *Moscow News* to leave my job. I spent a morning getting the permission, while Jack made the rounds of the embassies, getting information about regulations for entry into Poland and Germany. Then we met at the passport bureau and got into the queue. When our turn came we handed the clerk the forms we had filled out.

"Your residence visa," she said to Jack.

"Visa?"

"Visa! You're a foreigner, aren't you?" she said patiently,

[1] Red Square was called "Red" long before the Bolsheviks took power. The word "krasnaya" in Russian means red, but it used to also mean "beautiful", and the early Muscovites had an eye for beauty when they built the Kremlin on the knoll above the river.

like a teacher repeating to a dull child. "You have a visa which allows you to live here? If you ask for an exit visa you must give up your residence visa. May I have it, please?"

Jack turned to me in consternation. "We can't get married without a residence visa, can we?"

Never having tried, I did not know. "I suppose you've got to have some paper to show you belong here."

"All this cursed red tape," grumbled Jack. "Later!" he growled at the impatient clerk. He left the window, pulling me with him.

"Come on. Let's hurry or the damn place will be closed when we get back. That'll put us off another day and I've been promised reservations if I can get the visas today. I suppose I'll get to Berlin and discover my miserable passport has expired already. That'll mean more trouble."

We had seen a ZAGS (registration bureau) not far from the passport office and we raced toward it. There was no queue. We sighed, smiled in blissful relief, and sat down in front of the clerk. Jack pulled his residence visa out of his pocket and I produced mine.

"But you don't live in this district," said the clerk as she looked over the documents. "You can't be married here. You've got to go to your own district. Luckily you both live in the same one."

"What's the address?"

"I don't know," complacently. "They moved last week. Go to the information bureau of the militia and find out."

At the information bureau we learned that our ZAGS was two street-car rides and a three-blocks walk away.

"Come on, let's hurry," said Jack, grabbing me by the arm and pushing me out the door. We had been in Moscow so long that we knew better than to stand in line for a highly problematical taxi. We ran for the nearest street car. I jumped on and with Jack's aid pushed my way in while he remained hanging on the steps. With skill born of much practice I elbowed through the mass of resisting and passive bodies, jumped off the front end, straightened my beret,

and met Jack as he let go his hold of the rear step. He looked at his watch.

"I've got to go to the German Embassy too. Don't know whether I'll make it or not. It would be too bad to lose those 'plane reservations. Come on, let's hurry."

And then, when he nearly pushed me into a horse as we crossed the street, I suddenly remembered my schoolgirl notions of wedding-days—soft music and orange blossoms and happy solemnity. Here I was in my suit with the darn in the elbow and the stockings that bagged at the heel because someone had bought them for me in London and they were three sizes too large. I was being dragged out of buildings and pushed into jammed street cars and muddy gutters by a bridegroom whose only thought was hurry. I was overwhelmed with pity for myself.

"Stop hurrying me," I said, shaking Jack's hand off my elbow. "You've done nothing but rush all morning. I've also got appointments this afternoon. I don't care if we *do* miss the 'plane. And whose idea was it to get married, anyway?"

Jack stopped and looked at me soberly, startled by my display of temper. Then he smiled gently, contrite. "I'm sorry I've been rushing you so. Getting tangled up in all this red tape of visas and reservations and permits and what-not makes me forget everything else. This *isn't* exactly a young girl's dream of a wedding-day, is it?"

I was mollified. "Well, I'm not exactly a young girl either, so that's all right." So we quit worrying about the German Embassy and the 'plane reservations and proceeded on our merry way to ZAGS.

ZAGS was being re-painted and we could not find the number. We inquired of a woman in a peasant kerchief. She looked hopelessly up and down the street and replied:

"The devil only knows. They're always flying. . . . There's a militia-man down the street two blocks. Ask him."

We laughed. A friend of ours, bound on a similar errand, had asked a militia-man to direct him.

"I don't know where the ZAGS is!" was the gruff answer.

"Why don't you know?" asked our friend, ruffled. "That's your business, isn't it?"

A pair of peasant eyes looked out in honest surprise at him.

"Why should I know, Citizen? It's *you* who wants to get married, not me!"

But our militia-man was better. Of course he did not know, but he answered gently, from under his round grey helmet.

"I don't know, Little Citizeness. Honest to God I don't know. I'd tell you if I did."

We went back to studying the house numbers again. Not finding 21, which was what we wanted, we contented ourselves with 19 and entered a courtyard piled high with lumber, oil-cans and broken boxes, full of neighbour women nursing babies in the sun and a few kind old grandfathers playing chequers.

One of them tried to help us, stepping into one doorway after another and emerging with the cheerful announcement:

"It's not here. It must be there."

Eventually he found the door tucked away under a rickety ladder. We thanked him and entered.

ZAGS was a great disappointment. Others I had visited were decorated with posters which showed graphically the evils of alcoholism and venereal diseases, phases in the development of the human embryo and the kind of clothes and toys Soviet babies should have. But this one had just moved into new quarters and there was nothing except the bare essentials: a table for registering marriages, another for divorces, a third for births and deaths and a fourth whose use I could not guess.

"I suppose that's for recording documents," ventured Jack. "You know the Russian custom—a paper for everything."

At the table next to ours an old woman tearfully requested a copy of her daughter's death certificate, and a young

woman shyly asked the clerk to find out whether her baby had been registered as "Vassili Ivanovich" or "Gregori Ivanovich".

"I wanted the baby to be named Vassili after my father. My husband wanted him to be named after his own father, Gregori. He says he told you 'Vassili' but I want to be sure everything is straight so no one can say it isn't my baby."

The clerk set her right. The child's legal name was Vassili. She went out smiling happily.

We moved into the chairs in front of the "marriage" desk.

"Name, address, age, ever been married before, where do you work?" the clerk asked each of us in turn. She filled out the form and asked one more question: would I adopt Jack's name, would he adopt mine, or would each keep his own.[1] Then she looked over our trade union cards—not the resident permits we had so arduously saved for her—collected the two- or three-ruble fee and turned to some other work she had to do.

"Is that all?" asked Jack after a minute.

"That's all."

We got to the door and she called us back, no longer curt and business-like. Eagerly she took out of the drawer of her desk two books and held them out to us.

"I'm studying English. Last night I got these books to read. I'd like to know what you think of them."

One was Dickens' *Bleak House*, the other O. Henry's *Of Sixes and Sevens*. She smiled gratefully when we approved her choice, and returned to her work.

Jack turned to me as we climbed over the lumber in the yard.

[1] This modern touch seems even more remarkable when one ponders the meaning of the Russian words for marriage. A man "zhenitsa"—literally "wifes himself", apparently a very casual step. But a woman "vikhodet zamuzh" which means "goes out behind her husband". These old words are generally used even now, though it is possible to say that either the man or woman "registered himself" (at ZAGS).

"Well, I guess that means we're married."

"And no rice or anything," said I.

"And no old shoes," added Jack.

"Except these on my feet."

Jack laughed. "But they're very nice feet."

We walked on. The sun shone, and the grass on the boulevard was young and green.

"Do you think the passport office is still open?" I asked after a while. Jack looked at his watch. "Maybe it is. Shall we try to make it?"

With a practised eye I measured the distance to a street car on the corner.

"Come on. Let's hurry," I said. And we ran after the street car and jumped on.

CHAPTER VIII

HAPPY FAMILY—WORKER STYLE

I COULD DO WITHOUT wedding bells. But I did expect congratulations when I came home and announced my marriage. There was nothing of the sort.

Marfusha sighed deeply:

"Now that's a punishment from heaven!"

"Why—Marfusha! I thought you'd be glad and wish me happiness."

"It's a punishment. Such a nice young lady and she goes and gets married. Marriage is a gamble, Seema Simeonovna. You never know what you're getting. Take my husband. Such a fine handsome man he was! Yet he beat me, may his soul rest in peace." She crossed herself out of deference to the dead.

"Who knows? Maybe your man will beat you too."

"Americans don't beat their wives, Marfusha. Men don't do it here any more as they used to, either."

"Maybe in America they don't. I don't know how it is in your country. But here they do. Don't you believe what those Bolsheviks tell you!"

Once on the subject of the Bolsheviks she forgot my troubles and hobbled into the kitchen to grumble the rest of the morning about "Soviet potatoes".

. . . . .

Marfusha was partly right. Wife-beating still occurs occasionally in backward Russia families. The Bolsheviks, who prosecute it vigorously, would be the last to deny it. But such "uncultured" behaviour is distinctly the exception. In the Russian household into which we moved, wife-beating would have been as strange as in our own.

Dmitri Strelkov was a fond and indulgent husband, so indulgent that he overlooked his wife's "passivity" and disinterest in study and social work. As a good Communist he felt it his duty to make his wife "politically conscious" and "pull her up to his level". But he loved her too much to be firm with her.

Dmitri was an expert engraver, a huge fellow, good-natured, slow of speech and none too quick of thought. He had the honest face of so many Russians—big mouth, a nose that turned up at the end, small eyes, muddy colouring, a face full of simple earnestness and honesty. Except when he danced, he moved slowly.

Every night when we came home late we would find him studying Marx and political economy in our room, to get away from the chatter in his own. We would apologize for driving him out and he would say wearily that he was about to quit, anyway. Studying was hard for him but he never gave up.

"You know what Lenin said, 'Study, study, study!' Without political theory one cannot understand what goes on in our country. A Communist must set the pace in study, as in everything else."

His wife, Anna, was short and broad, a plump woman of thirty-five, with even features and a thick head of hair which she wore parted in the middle and drawn smoothly down so that it framed her pleasant face. She was a good-natured soul who could always manage to steal a half-hour from her housekeeping to hang out of her fourth-floor window gossiping cheerily with the neighbours. She was open-hearted and friendly, unsophisticated and utterly lacking in guile.

Anna had an almost childlike devotion and admiration for and dependence upon her big kindly husband. As a bride she had sewn mothballs into the seams of Dmitri's clothes to protect him from typhus when the Bolsheviks sent him on a grain-collecting mission to Siberia. White armies and rebellious peasants, as well as typhus, were

the dangers he risked to bring back grain for starving Moscow.

She did not forget the hazards of that early journey. She never was quite at ease in Dmitri's absence. When he went away to a rest home for a month she pined and, quite unashamed, wept with loneliness. There was nothing Soviet and independent about this Russian wife.

Their daughter Vera was a shy awkward girl of fourteen with a pretty complexion. She was obedient, retiring and mouse-like. We never heard her express an opinion or wish of her own. I always compared her with another fourteen-year-old I knew in Moscow. That young lady not only had opinions on every subject but was outspokenly critical of her mother because she remained a mere housewife instead of becoming a factory worker and helping with socialist construction.

Such extreme shyness as Vera's was rare in a Soviet child. I tried to draw her out but she always blushed and replied in a polite monosyllable. If she had any ideas she kept them to herself. I decided she was a "problem". But she was no problem to her mother, who lovingly pressed Vera's dresses so she would look nice for school, and accepted her as she was.

Anna was astonished and troubled one day when she visited the school and learned that her Vera had a beautiful voice. The music teacher urged the mother to let her place the girl in the Moscow Theatre School.

I could imagine the ecstasy of my lady-dentist if such talent had been discovered in her daughter. But Anna was only distressed, and waited anxiously for Dmitri to come home and settle the problem. Dmitri settled it.

"We won't send her to any theatre school. What is singing? We want her to get an education first. She must be a politically-conscious Soviet citizen who works for socialist construction. Let her learn a trade. Later she can study singing if she wants to!"

He asked me what I thought about it. I said that singing was a profession just like engraving. Vera's gifts should be developed early. In the Theatre School she would learn arithmetic and political science just as in any other school.

But Dmitri was adamant. To him there could be no higher calling than that of an honest worker. He wanted his daughter to be a worker. Afterwards she could be a singer. Vera said nothing. When we left Moscow the following year she was still in the regular public school.

. . . . . .

The Strelkovs lived in a big block of workers' apartments, part of a planned unit in the developing "new Moscow". There were twelve five-story buildings including a post office, co-operative store, drug store, barber shop and, across the street, a club and theatre. The courtyards, planted with grass and trees, were filled all day and through much of the summer night with children and adults reading, playing volley-ball or singing to accordion accompaniments.

When we wanted to get out of earshot of radios and accordions we walked a block to the old Donskoi Monastery, built in the sixteenth century to commemorate a victory over Tartar invaders. Later it became one of a ring of protecting fortresses which surrounded the city. Its thick battlemented walls and massive corner towers enclosed a tree-shaded graveyard, among whose mossy stones we strolled, speculating about the past.

Our home provided little atmosphere for speculating about anything except the present. Three families lived in three rooms and shared kitchen, toilet and hall.

On one side of us there was a Communist engineer and his wife. His mother, an illiterate peasant woman, came frequently to visit from her backward village near Archangel. She usually slept, fully dressed, on the kitchen floor, preferring this to the couch in her son's room. She was a talkative lively old woman who went barefooted in the house and always grumbled when forced by Moscow

proprieties to put on shoes when she went out. Simple warm-hearted Anna appealed to her considerably more than her sophisticated daughter-in-law and they used to spend long hours in the kitchen in friendly conversation.

I was therefore much surprised when I returned home one night to find Anna sobbing bitterly as she scrubbed the toilet floor. The old woman was apparently the cause of her distress.

"I've shown her and shown her!" Anna exclaimed, waving her dripping scrub-brush. "What can I do! I try to teach her to be cultured but she just can't learn to use the toilet!"

Anna scrubbed and cleaned her part of the house as carefully as a good Dutch housewife. Her pride and joy was the big shiny nickel-plated bedstead. She polished the bed and wiped off the leaves of the potted rubber plant so they shone. Such a bed, a rubber plant, white lace curtains and a gleaming new samovar was the usually unattainable dream of millions of worker housewives in old Russia. Now these furnishings were becoming as common, under a rising living standard, as overstuffed davenports in America.

When her white-haired mother complained about difficult material conditions, Anna pointed to her rooms and furniture.

"Remember how we lived in a damp basement and you washed clothes all day to barely feed us?"

"I still wash clothes." She leaned over the steaming trough of clothes she was laundering for me.

"Yes. But you get a pension too. If it isn't big enough yet so you don't have to work at all, that's only because the government isn't rich enough yet. Pretty soon we'll have everything and you won't have to work."

The mother was used to working hard. It was not that which bothered her.

"You could buy meat in any store in the old days," she grumbled.

"But we never had the money to buy it with."

"Humph! Much good it does to have the money now! How much meat does it buy you, eh? Three kilos a month on your ration card!! And if you go to the open market for it God knows what you'll pay."

"What good did it do in the old days to have meat in the stores when all we could do was look at it? Pretty soon there'll be plenty of everything and there won't be any ration cards. Do you expect the government to build factories and give you chicken soup to grow fat on?"

Anna herself was not above criticizing the inconvenience and hardship of the food-rationing system.[1] It was because of the extra food we could give them from our rations that she and Dmitri moved their daughter into their room and rented hers to us. But like a mother who reserved to herself the right to analize the weaknesses of her own child, she allowed no one else to criticize the Soviet system. She continued to preach its advantages to her mother.

"Dmitri was sent to a rest home for a month last year with all expenses paid by his trade union. And this year he's going to the Caucasus again. How was it before the revolution? Dmitri's father worked in that same print shop all his life. Did he ever get a vacation? No! All he got after thirty years' work was a watch!"

Dmitri had told us how, as a youth, he used to see his father take the watch out of its velvet case and show it to his friends. Then he would put it back reverently. He carried it only once a year—to Easter church services.

Dmitri went into the same shop at fourteen, left it to fight in the Red Army, and then returned to it. The trade union later sent him to a technical school for a year or two.

[1] Dmitri's ration card permitted him to buy for himself and family, at government regulated prices, specified amounts of meat, sugar, flour, butter, etc. Rations were not generous, so Anna purchased additional supplies on the open market where peasants sold their excess products for whatever the traffic would bear. These prices were very high. Despite the fact that Dmitri got two meals a day at his plant restaurant and Vera one meal at school for a nominal price, preparing good meals in the Stelkov home required considerable careful managing.

Increased production of consumers' goods made it possible to end rationing in 1935.

Now he was an expert engraver, head of his department in one of Moscow's largest print shops. He carried his father's watch every day.

One of the biggest moments in Dmitri's life also came in the print shop.

When, in the early days of the October revolution, the Bolsheviks promulgated the all-important "Land Decree",[1] nationalizing Russia's land, which had heretofore belonged largely to the big landholders, a number of Moscow's print shops, influenced by rival parties wanting to sabotage the Bolshevik programme, refused to print it.

"Printers in half a dozen shops walked out. But we took a vote and decided to stick with the Bolsheviks. We printed the land decree. The press that did the work is in our shop museum right now. Visitors from the provinces always come to have a look at it."

. . . . .

I had a hard time understanding how any Soviet citizen could own an apartment. Dmitri laid aside his books one night to explain:

"Five years ago I joined a 'Housing Co-operative', an organization formed to build this apartment building. I put in all my savings and helped elect a committee to take charge of our affairs. The House Committee got a long-term loan from the government, bought materials and hired men to construct this building.

"When it was finished the members of the co-operative moved into the rooms they had contracted for. We pay a small rent that goes to retire the loan and keep the building in repair. We elect a House Committee every year and it collects the rent, orders repairs, and takes care of all other administrative duties. Once in a while if a problem comes up that's too serious for the Committee to handle, it calls a meeting and we all decide what's to be done."

[1] This, probably more than anything else, won for the Bolsheviks the support of the peasantry, which comprised three-quarters of the population.

"But these rooms are your own," I said. "You can paint them a different colour if you want to. You can sell them to somebody else. You can leave them to your daughter when you die. How does that differ from owning property in our country?"

"Yes. I can paint them whatever colour I want. But I can't sell them—that is, except under such severe restrictions that it's practically impossible.

"That's one of the main differences between your capitalist economy and our socialist economy. We can own property to *use*. But you own it to make a profit on. That's prohibited here.[1]

"Suppose I could buy and sell apartments as I pleased. I could probably get eight times as much for this now as I paid for it. Why? Not through any work of mine, but simply because Moscow's growing so fast there's a housing shortage. Why should I be allowed to make money without doing any work?

"What the Soviets are against is the private ownership of the means of production—not private ownership of the things a person needs in order to live a cultured life."

. . . . . .

Dmitri studied his Marx and Lenin. Anna walked on tiptoe the week before he was to appear before the Communist Party "Purging Commission".[2] She sat wiping perspiration from her ashen upper lip while her Dmitri recounted his life story and answered questions about political theory. The man who shared their flat had been

[1] Renting out a room was somewhat suspect as a possible source of profit-making. Dmitri, a Communist, charged us as rent less than a third of what we would gladly have paid, in order to escape any suspicion of making a profit at our expense. Others, particularly non-Communists, profited by Moscow's overcrowding to charge exorbitant rents. They ran some risk of being branded speculators and losing their title to the rooms they rented, but on the whole the authorities were obliged by shortage of dwelling space to ignore a considerable amount of rent-profiteering.

[2] Communists must periodically face an examining tribunal which passes on their worthiness for membership in the party. Those found wanting are "cleaned out". See chapter on "Soviet Muckraking."

demoted from the rank of party member to that of "sympathizer" for not knowing his politics. But Anna's Dmitri was to suffer no such social disgrace. He knew all the answers and was dismissed with a congratulatory nod from the chairman of the Commission.

Anna wept with joy and relief, and went home to arrange a celebration. She spent three days preparing food. Dmitri, looking ten years younger, bought a bottle of wine and several bottles of vodka. They invited their friends and relatives. After much eating and drinking and pledging of eternal friendship and devotion to the Communist Party and the Five-Year Plan, a friend with an accordion tuned up and the dancing began.

Big bear of a Dmitri grabbed up his little white-haired mother-in-law and swung her around a few times. Then he set her down and began the quick, flirtatious foot movements with which a Russian swain invites his lady fair to dance. The old woman put her hands on her hips, coquettishly shrugged a shoulder in time to the music, and stepped into the repetitive dance with Dmitri. She began to sing some ditty in her high thin voice. Dmitri added his big bass that filled the room.

"Let's have it oftener," he shouted to the musician, meaning not more music but quicker rhythm. The accordion expert sucked a gayer tune out of his instrument, wagging his head and rolling his eyes in the effort to equal the speed of Dmitri's lightning feet. Arms thrown out, feet clicking the floor, our happy Communist sat on his heel and spun around faster and faster, forgetting for one night all about his responsibilities towards the society of the future.

CHAPTER IX

HOME AND THE "SERVANT PROBLEM"

WE DID NOT stay long at the Strelkovs'. The *Moscow Daily News*, by quick action on the editor's part, came into possession of a room for one year, and by another diplomatic move assigned it to us.

Borodin, the editor, had a neighbour whose sister was accompanying her husband to work in a Soviet consulate abroad. This couple were willing to rent half of their two-room apartment to "solid" citizens who would take good care of it. The other half was occupied by the owner's sister.

Borodin's interest in the apartment is accounted for by the fact that in the Soviet Union of 1933, and to a considerable extent still, the place of work attempted to look out for all its employees' needs. Rooms, meals, ration cards, passes to rest homes in the Crimea, medical attention, theatre tickets at reduced prices, University scholarships—all could be obtained through the organization one worked for or through its trade union.

Thus large factories operated apartment houses, restaurants, clinics, children's nurseries, technical schools, club houses and other facilities for their workers. An important criterion of the success of a factory's management and trade union was their success in meeting these needs.

A small organization like ours could have no such elaborate set-up for its exclusive use. We shared most "services" with other organizations. But we had a restaurant of our own and five much-fought-over basement rooms in a dormitory.

So when Borodin heard about an additional room, he immediately signed a contract for it. There were a dozen people on the waiting list, but by giving it to my husband

and me he could house two staff members at once. We gave thanks to Borodin and, with joy in our hearts, moved in.

What a room it was! In the centre of the city, roomy and light, with huge windows from which we could see the Kremlin, with Ivan the Terrible's golden-domed church brilliant in the sun.

Nor was the view all. There was an elevator to our fifth-floor apartment. True, it worked only to take passengers up, not down, and occasionally stalled between the third and fourth floors. But an elevator in an apartment building was such luxury that we forgave ours its caprices.

We had not only a bath but a shower too. To celebrate the acquisition of these riches we issued a blanket invitation to the *Moscow News* to come and take baths, with soap for everybody and towels as long as they lasted.

If the view of the Kremlin from our windows was beautiful, the view as one entered the apartment left something to be desired. The caller was stared in the face by a glassy-eyed, stuffed mountain goat wrapped in tattered newspapers, and menaced from above by a bicycle suspended from the ceiling. These, our landlady's sister explained, were toys of the landlady's daughter, now deceased, and not to be molested upon penalty of immediate eviction.

Nor was this all. The hallway was half filled by an ancient red-leather davenport, frequently occupied by the landlady's half-witted brother, who spent the day in this apartment in order to be out of the way of the brother who housed him at night. The poor creature was accompanied to our house by his mother, who tenderly ministered to all his wants and sadly told us of an illness which had dulled the boy. He was a most distressing spectacle, since he stared silently and persistently at all who entered (somewhat in the manner of Groucho Marx), thereby frightening certain of our female acquaintances almost out of their own wits. But a room like that was worth a few inconveniences.

. . . . .

I found that keeping house in Moscow was in 1933 too much for a woman who had a full-time job.

There were no efficient laundries, no washing machines, no vacuum cleaners and few electric irons; no scouring powder and not enough soap. There were long queues in almost every food store. Moscow housewives could not "run out to the corner grocery" for a can of soup or a bottle of milk, a box of breakfast food[1] or the makings of a salad. The choice of fruits and vegetables was extremely limited except during a short summer season. Fresh eggs were almost unobtainable. Modern methods of food-processing, storage and distribution were being developed but they could not begin to meet the demand.

The Soviet plan was to "free women from the drudgery of the kitchen" by communal services of all kinds. But the reality, as yet, fell far short of the ideal. For example, many factory restaurants served only one meal a day, making it necessary for the worker to get the others at home. As a result, many Russian women who wanted to take jobs continued to be only housewives. Many of those who did work outside the home had mothers or aunts to run their households. Those who earned enough to pay and feed another person, employed houseworkers if they could get them.

I came in the last category. Searching tirelessly for two weeks I managed to find a competent houseworker. After a month she left us, explaining with many apologies that her Komsomol son, a lathe-hand at the Moscow Ball-Bearing Plant, wanted her to acquire the prestige of a "worker in productive enterprise". He was of the opinion that "only the more backward elements remain in the kitchen".

[1] Early in 1934 when one of the huge new American-model food plants began producing corn flakes, it had considerable difficulty in creating consumer demand for the unknown product. The Russians did not know how to use it. A friend of ours encountered an old woman at one of the open markets in Moscow offering a glass of corn flakes for sale and assuring prospective customers: "It makes wonderful soup! All you have to do is boil it."

"He wants me to attend classes at the plant and raise my qualifications," she told me. "I'm afraid I won't like it, but I don't want him to be ashamed of me."

That was the "servant" problem in Moscow.

Even if a woman were willing to work in someone's home for wages, her son or her friends or public opinion in general pushed her out of the menial category into that of the skilled worker. For Moscow's three million residents in 1932 there were only 35,000 houseworkers, and many of these were deserting the kitchen.

What could I offer a houseworker? Fifty rubles a month, a hard bed in the kitchen to sleep on, and three meals a day. True, the trade union contract which I was required by law to sign with her, stipulated that in addition I must provide two weeks' vacation with pay, a certain number of aprons a year, require her to work no more than eight hours a day and no more days a week than I worked on my own job.

The trade union itself, in conjunction with the Commissariat of Education, offered her many opportunities for self-advancement. Courses in reading and writing had reduced illiteracy from 70 per cent (of all Moscow houseworkers) in 1924 to 15 per cent in 1932.[1] There were classes in political theory, mathematics, sanitation, sewing, first-aid, even electro-mechanics. The trade union led excursions, conducted dramatic circles, opened club rooms and eighty-two "Red Corners" in the city where the houseworker could read, study, dance, and forget her pots and pans.

But the job gave her no prestige in the community. It definitely detracted from her standing. To have been a houseworker before industrialization was begun was no stigma in the eyes of the Bolsheviks. Opportunities for other work then were almost non-existent.

But in Moscow of the Five-Year Plan a woman had only to mention that she wanted a job and half a dozen factories

[1] Trade Union figures.

and construction organizations would be fighting for even her unskilled services.[1]

Once in the factory she was pushed into classes to "increase her qualifications", forced by the pressure of trade union and public opinion to pass the "technical minimum" examinations and change to a job requiring greater skill and paying more wages. Thus all along the line till, a worker with a good record and the ability and desire to study, she might be sent to the University on a scholarship to acquire professional training.

Why any girl consented to work as a servant is the question that immediately arises. Almost invariably it was for one reason. Even the best factory had insufficient rooms for its workers. Even the worst job as a houseworker provided the girl with a place to sleep. When this evil of insufficient housing has disappeared, it will be even more difficult to get an intelligent and capable houseworker in Moscow or anywhere else in the USSR.

. . . . .

Forty-year-old Katya, whom we found after much searching, was an exception to the rule. She had the soul of a slave and no son to be ashamed of her for it. She was a tall, angular flat-footed spinster with long pale hair and a most lugubrious expression. Her little knob of a nose was always red and her weak eyes always moist as though she had just finished a good cry.

She had a meek little tremor in her voice and for two months she never started a meal without first asking which kettle to cook the soup in. When she did stop that practice it was out of deference to me as her "boss" and not because I had convinced her that she knew more about cooking than I. Katya believed that God had made me to give orders and her to take them.

[1] Factory workers were sent to their native villages to recruit peasants for their plants. Cut-throat competition for labour became so acute that early in the First Five-Year Plan stringent measures were adopted to prevent organizations from enticing already-employed workers to new jobs. Factories speeded housing programmes in order to use a "room" as additional bait for workers.

Many uneducated Russians need little excuse for reminding you that they are a backward people. But Katya went further. When I urged her to attend the classes for the liquidation of illiteracy which were being held in our building, she made a sweeping generalization about the Bolsheviks' attempt to educate the people.

"They can't make the Russian cultured. The Russian peasant can't learn. He'll always be ignorant and dirty."

Katya herself was not a peasant, but the daughter of a book-keeper from the upper Volga. She had had a little schooling as a child, cut short by an attack of scarlet fever which weakened her eyes, and, I suspect, dulled her mentality.

Though she was undeniably Russian, she looked German and was very proud of that fact. She had worked for German women, wives of engineers with Soviet jobs, and greatly admired the methodical efficiency with which they gave orders. It suited her "serf soul" to have everything decided for her. By comparison, the Russians she knew were hopelessly "uncultured". Katya half thought, I suspect, that by being sufficiently contemptuous of the Russians she would become the next thing to a German and in some mystic manner begin to exhale their culture.[1] But of course she did nothing to bring on that happy state.

Nevertheless she was proud of her nieces and nephews, Komsomols who had been educated by the Soviets and now held good positions in its new developing industries. When I reminded her that these young people were a product of the new order, Katya reminded me that they had been brought up in a good religious family and that was what accounted for their success.

But our Katya had her good points. She was honest, she was a fairly good cook, she knew the legends on every ikon which we brought home from the Commission Shops,

[1] Under the Tsar Germans frequently held higher positions than Russian subjects. The story is told that General Yermolov, returning from a successful campaign in the Caucasus, was asked by the grateful Tsar what he would have as a reward. "Your Majesty," replied the general, "make me a German."

and she could tell endless stories of the superstitions and customs prevailing in her home town on the upper Volga.

"At Christmas-time we used to draw a circle on the floor and place corn, rye and oat grains around the edge of it. Then each girl would take off her ring or a ribbon or something and put it down somewhere on the circle. Somebody would set a hen down in the centre of the circle. The hen would go for the grain and whosoever's ring was nearest the grain, that girl would be a bride within the year.

"If the hen goes near the mirror that's been put in the centre of the circle, that means it will be a fine wedding. If she goes near the water the bride's husband will be a drunkard."

Another custom was to roll a barrel down hill. All the girls would run after it and the one to reach it first would be a bride of the year. Or a girl would be blindfolded and spun around till she was dizzy. If she could point to the barrel she would be an early bride.

"Are they always about brides, Katya?"

"Always about brides," she would laugh shyly. Katya herself had pointed to the barrel one Christmas and shortly thereafter plighted her troth. But her betrothed fell ill and died and she was left unwed.

She told us with solemn eyes and hushed voice that if a person stood at midnight between two mirrors so that he could see himself in both, and if, simultaneously, two candles were burning in the room, something terrible was sure to happen.

"People have been found badly beaten, cut up, killed, after doing that. Some were left deaf and dumb for the rest of their lives."

"But if they know what will happen, why do they stand between two mirrors?"

"The evil spirit takes hold of them. They can't help it."

Katya was a fruitful if unscientific source of information about all the ikons we showed her. I asked her one day

why it was that Saint Nikolai was depicted on them more often than any other saint. This was her explanation:

"God called Nikolai and another saint to a meeting one day. As they were walking along they met a mujik whose cart was stuck in the mud and the mujik asked them to help him.

"'I can't stop,' said Nikolai's companion. 'I'm on my way to see God.'

"But Nikolai pulled his fine robes up above his knees and waded into the mud and pulled and pulled and got the cart out. Then he hurried on. But he arrived late to the meeting.

"'Why are you late?' asked God.

"So Nikolai told him the whole story. When he finished God turned to the other saint and said:

"'You thought it was more important to come to me on time with your robes clean than to help a poor mujik in distress. But you did wrong and Nikolai did right. From this day Nikolai shall be honoured three days to your one and Russia will remember him as its noblest saint.'"

PART II

PEASANTS AND "COMRADE DIRECTORS"

CHAPTER X

"THE DARKEST PART OF OLD RUSSIA"

ON THE STEPPE the momentous harvest of 1933 was coming in, the harvest that was to mark the end of scarcity and the turning point in the struggle over collectivization of agriculture. *Moscow News* sent me down to Korablino district in the south-east corner of Moscow Province to get a story on it.

We took the train at midnight, a Russian reporter, a photographer and I. The only tickets available on the then chronically overcrowded trains were "hard without reservations", that is, for a third-class coach which would carry as many passengers as could squeeze in.

We squeezed through the coach door, pushed by 40 other plunging, grunting passengers who jostled us with their bundles to make us move faster. Inside, oddly enough, there was at first plenty of room for each of us— eight feet of uncontested bare pine shelf extending in from the walls of the train.

Afanasiev, the smug little Russian reporter whose first interest was always to look out for himself, climbed to an upper shelf and settled down to sleep. But the photographer Polovetsky and I, naïvely optimistic, remained on the lower benches and had an eventful night.

Polovetsky appreciatively sniffed the strong odour of lysol that permeated the coach, and explained with his customary pride in Soviet achievements that the train had been thoroughly disinfected and not a bug would disturb our slumber. Then he stretched out to sleep with his arms wrapped tightly around two precious German cameras. Fear of thieves haunted him; his friends swore he guarded them more jealously than he did his pretty young wife.

The train started, and, stretching out on the bench with my coat wrapped around me, I was soon asleep. I wakened some hours later to find a tumultuous flock of peasants swarming into our section, pushing bundles under the seats, shoving one another out of the way . . . talking, shouting, gesticulating, smelling. One of them unceremoniously jammed my legs back to the wall and sat down. I heard his companion say to another, pointing at the still-sleeping Polovetsky:

"Shove him over and sit down. He's no more entitled to the space than you are."

"Ye-es," said the other dubiously. "Maybe. But look at the leather coat he's wearing. He's probably a big bird. I'll move his legs over and then find out he's SOMEBODY. No thanks!"

"And what does it matter if he is?" inquired a third, gruffly. "What have you done that you must step quietly as a thief? The train doesn't belong to him because he wears a leather coat.[1] I'm a citizen too, just like him."

And thus announcing his contempt for his neighbour's "serf soul", and his disbelief in the right of the "leather-coated" to better conditions than those of other Soviet citizens, he shoved Polovetsky over and sat down.

The photographer wakened reluctantly, and sat up, yawning. But suddenly I saw him clutch at his neck, pull something away, and peer at it with horror.

"A louse!" he whispered. "Wrap your coat around you."

He edged away from his unbathed neighbour, but that worthy, thinking generosity made Polovetsky move over, smiled his thanks and moved still closer. Poor Polovetsky huddled unhappily into his coat.

I was amused. As a boy Polovetsky had done hazardous spying for the Reds during the Civil War, riding from town to town disguised as a vendor of sunflower seeds and

[1] A black or brown leather coat was at one time generally worn by Communist commissars. To the common man it became the symbol of the Soviet official.

reporting movements of the Whites. Never having lived through a typhus epidemic, I had none of his fear of the louse and thought it incongruous that this one-time hero should quail before such an adversary.

. . . . .

At the Riazan station I wakened to find dozens of new peasant passengers trooping in, stamping their booted feet, cursing because someone moved too fast or not fast enough, climbing over each other. They dropped heavy sacks from their shoulders with grunts of relief, lay down on them or on the floor and immediately began to snore.

I counted eight people on the benches Polovetsky and I had occupied, and six more on the floor around them.

Two clean young girls were among the lot, wearing linen dresses and canvas shoes whitened so thoroughly that powder rubbed off on everything they touched. I took them to be one generation removed from the peasantry, probably factory girls on a holiday. They found places opposite me and sat up straight as pokers, drawing their skirts away from their dingy neighbours.

One of the girls said to her friend:

"I wonder what happened to that nice young Georgian who was waiting on the platform near me. He was going to Tambov too. He was *so* good-looking!" Hopefully, "Maybe he'll show up yet."

I dozed again, and wakened to find the handsome Georgian shoving me over so that he could sit on the edge of the bench and admire the two girls. Next time I opened my eyes he was pulling off his shoes and socks, meditatively rubbing his toes and observing, between smiles, that his feet were disgracefully dirty, a fact which needed no comment.

Later in the night I saw him across the aisle, half-sitting on somebody's bundle, his head resting on the package which one of the well-scrubbed maidens held in her lap

and his feet, the same dirty, bare feet, propped up on the wall for support. The girl, her distaste for the unwashed now forgotten, was looking admiringly into his handsome face.

A gentle rain began to blow through the window. We stood with heads leaning out, breathing the clear wet air and smelling the moist earth under the rising sun.

. . . . .

Morning came over little villages nestled on the steppe in sleep; pale sun rays touched the fields, turning the grain to gold for miles on either side of the track.

In the midst of these golden fields, the Korablino station dozed in the sun, with black ribbons of road leading out from it to villages beyond the horizon.

We dropped off the train and looked around. Three or four grizzled peasants were loafing along the whitewashed wall of the station. They wore bast shoes of crudely plaited birch bark, the ubiquitous "lapti" which for so long had marked the low living standard of the Russian village. Their legs were wrapped to the knees in dirty homespun, almost as coarse as gunny-sacking, and bound with thongs of twisted bark.

One of them, wearing his winter fur cap despite the heat, pulled himself away from the wall and came up to us.

"You wouldn't be the people from Moscow, would you?"

"The very ones," answered Afanasiev.

"The cart's behind the station."

We followed him around the muddy yard and climbed on to the peasant cart. It was small, crudely made, with neither springs nor seats, and we bounced around on it uncomfortably till we chose the easier course of walking.

Such a road! It had been raining for days and now the mud had dried, hard as a rock, between the ruts. Every jolt reminded me again of the backwardness of Soviet transportation.

We passed several wagon-loads of cucumbers bound for Korablino, each drawn by a skinny horse. The wagons were small, the loads pitifully meagre, the horses dragged slowly across miles of country, the peasant drivers dangled their rag-bound feet and swayed with the bumps. Altogether it was a picture some unfriendly cartoonist might sneeringly have labelled: "Soviet Agriculture Moves Forward."

The immensity of the job the Soviets had undertaken was suddenly brought home to me as it had never been in Moscow . . . to lift 125,000,000 peasants out of the Middle Ages and in the course of two or three years make them efficient producers and fit citizens of the developing socialist society. The audacity of it was breath-taking.

But the sun was beating down on a picture of abundance and it was impossible to be in anything but a hopeful mood. A golden harvest of ripening grain stretched to the horizon, rippling in the breeze. Here and there were stretches of fallow soil or rich black fields where the land had already been ploughed for the fall sowing. No house or barn or tree marred the gentle rise and fall of the broad collective farm fields.

Topping a low rise we suddenly saw this unending stretch of grain broken by a dozen or so small strips, each of them a different shade of green or yellow.

"Individual farmers?" I asked Polovetsky. He nodded.

"The patchwork effect looks out of place, doesn't it?"

This was the age-old system of Russian peasant agriculture. Throughout Central Russia before the revolution the bulk of the peasant holdings belonged to the village "in common" and were parcelled out periodically in a meeting of all the peasants.

Because some land was better than others, each villager customarily got a strip of each type. As a result his land was scattered, sometimes for miles, and he wasted much time trudging from one piece to another. The uncultivated furrow dividing each narrow strip from the neighbouring

one was wasted land, an excellent breeding place for weeds. More important, the small holdings, many of which were only a few yards across, prevented the use of efficient farm implements and machinery.

At the village near the strips, we found a dozen drab, weather-beaten little huts straggling along both sides of the road. Their thatched roofs were heavy, sodden with the rains of many years. Several houses sagged to one side as though too tired to stand up straight any more.

Grandmothers and older sisters were rocking babies in hammocks swung under large old trees. The infants' faces were completely covered with old rags to keep off the flies on this hot July day.

"Keeps the air off too," I observed.

Polovetsky replied: "Sure. But we're in old Riazan province now, and you can't expect much better. The very name Riazan used to be synonymous with backwardness and ignorance. It was the darkest part of old Russia."

. . . . .

We stopped for a drink at a grey hut where a bearded grandfather was sitting on the step. His gaunt wife brought out some water and his daughter, hoping for gossip, settled down on the step to nurse her child and listen.

"How's the crop?" asked Polovetsky.

"It'll pass."

"Reaped any yet?"

The old fellow turned his lined face toward us, eyeing Polovetsky with small shrewd eyes.

"Son's out reaping now."

"You're an individual farmer?"

"Yes. And why not?" belligerently.

"It's your business, of course. I just wondered how you happened to be home at such a busy time. You're the only man in the village today."

"If I choose to sit home, whose business is it? Am I a collective farmer, to be told when to work and when to

sit home? Work isn't a wolf, it won't run away into the woods."

"Is that why you didn't join—because you didn't want to be told when to work?" I put in.

"One reason. I've gotten along all right alone for sixty years. What do I need with the collective? I'll put my horse in and God knows what fool will tend it. Drushkin over here next to me joined the collective and first thing he knew his horse was dead."

"And what did he do then?" asked Afanasiev quietly.

"What did he do?" The old man squinted up at us in the bright sunshine. "Why, he went right on doing whatever he was doing. How do I know what he was doing?" testily.

"But if he'd been an individual farmer and his horse died—then what?" Afanasiev pursued his point.

Silence. No answer was required. He knew, and so did we, what a calamity was the death of a horse for a poor peasant working his strips alone.[1]

The silence was broken by a great guffaw from a toothless old fellow who had come up quietly and was listening and watching us with quick squirrel eyes.

"How's that for an answer, you old rooster?" he chortled through his whiskers. "What would you do if that old wind-broken nag of yours died, huh?"

Chuckling to himself he pulled a roll of newspaper out of his pocket and tore off a three-inch strip. Carefully refolding the paper, he put it away and rolled himself a cigarette of powerful makhorka in the strip of newspaper. When I offered him a Moscow cigarette he hastily put his own away in his pocket, carefully wiped a thumb and forefinger on his shiny trousers, and picked one out with a grateful smile.

[1] As late as 1926 one-third of the peasants in the central grain-growing regions had no horse of their own. They had to work for others to pay for the ploughing. As a rule, the best ploughing season was spent working the richer peasant's land.

He was a garrulous old peasant, eager for talk. By the time we had thanked the individual farmer for the drink and gone back to our wagon, he had asked where we came from, where we were going and why, whether I was Afanasiev's wife, and a half-dozen other questions.

I stopped the interrogation by asking how long he had been a collective farmer.

"I was one of the first to join. My son's in the Red Army. How could I work my own farm? I'm too old to plough. But the collective has work for an old man too. I'm the watchman. In the collective we old ones can earn our own livings. We don't have to wait, like the little birds, for someone to drop food in our mouths."

"Seems the old man back there doesn't agree with you."

"Naw. There's no fool like an old fool. There's a few more like him. Take my neighbour Tarasov. Says he wants to keep his own bit of land. Says his father got it when the Tsar gave him his freedom and he wants to leave it to his son.

"His boy's smart, though. He can see which way the wind blows. 'Let's join the collective, Father,' he says. 'It'll be gayer when the field is wide and all the lads work together.' But the father says no—a stubborn ass he is.

"Well," he finished sagely. "He'll die sooner or later. The old fools always die."

Half a mile beyond the village we came to a wayside shrine.

It was a small weather-beaten model of a church perched on a pedestal with a cross projecting from its dome. Choked with weeds and half-swallowed up amid the fat acres of collective farm grain, the shrine looked lost and forgotten.

In earlier years the village priest had led his flock here, bearing ikons and church banners, to pray for rain—for sun—for a plentiful harvest. Now the weeds were almost as high as the shrine. Polovetsky jerked his head toward it:

"The agronomist has stolen the priest's thunder. As soon as the peasants learned what causes crop failures and how to fight them, they stopped coming here to pray.

"People used to think the Russian peasant was deeply religious; what he really was, was deeply superstitious and ignorant. The old peasant saying hit it right: 'If it didn't thunder the mujik would never cross himself.'"

. . . . .

We overtook a slim brown-eyed peasant youth and gave him a ride. He smiled shyly and sat without a word until Afanasiev referred to me as "the Amerikanka". Then he turned eagerly:

"Tell me about America!"

His questions showed a strange combination of naïveté and understanding. He wanted to know about the Scottsboro case . . . why America permitted lynching, how tall was the Woolworth building . . . did all the houses have elevators . . . how soon would the revolution come, and did all American workers own automobiles.

I told him a little about America, and when I had finished, he told me a little about himself.

He had lived all but a few months of his twenty years in the little village of Priankovo a few miles away. Finishing the local school, he had joined the Young Communists who sent him to a Komsomol training school for a few months. That was enough to whet his appetite. He wanted to study more.

"Engineering?" I asked, knowing the usual Russian boy's admiration for the men who were building industry.

"No—politics," he answered.

History, economics, disarmament, international relations —his eyes lit up as he talked. His voice grew eager. This son of illiterate peasants saw whole worlds outside that little village miles from a railroad in the heart of what was once "the darkest part of old Russia".

But leaders were needed in the village and he had been sent home from the Komsomol school to become secretary of his unit. This group of young Soviet citizens, led by the Machine Tractor Station's Political Section, had rid Priankovo village of the age old custom of "kulachni boi" (group fist fights).

The kulachni boi was centuries old in Russia. Fist fights, sometimes "to the death", were fought on Moscow's Red Square in the sixteenth century, for the entertainment of Ivan the Terrible and the glory of his henchmen who challenged all comers. Lermontov's poem, "Song of the Merchant Kalashnikov", tells of a Moscow merchant who avenged his wife by killing one of Ivan's favourites with his bare fists, and was himself beheaded as a result. According to the poet, Ivan softened the punishment by dressing the executioner in fine raiment and ordering the axe specially sharpened for Kalashnikov's neck.

Less glory and less danger attached to the kulachni boi in Priankovo. Neighbouring Podvislov villagers merely strolled over en masse one Sunday every July for a friendly fist fight. Women came in their best aprons, men with vodka on their breaths.

First the young boys would challenge each other, then the youths and then the men, till dozens were fighting for the glory of their village and their own reputations. Neither Tsarist edicts nor Soviet education had been able to quash the custom up to 1933.

"I once saw a man from our village kill a Podvislov fellow," the boy told me. "Then he went up to the widow and apologized, saying it was all in fun."

"That must have been a great comfort to her. What an insane way of having fun!"

"Sure. But you can't blame the mujiks. The whole rotten system they lived under kept them dark and uncultured. There wasn't anything else for them to do. No radios, no libraries, no schools like we have now. Hardly any of 'em could read.

"After collectivization began the kulaks[1] helped to keep the practice alive because it disrupted the work of the collective and set one village against the other. They used to buy vodka to get the fights started."

So the Priankovo Komsomols, hating kulaks and vodka and backwardness, and gravely conscious of their obligation to "raise the cultural le el" of their village, talked it over with the Political Section[2] chief. And then they wrote a letter to the men of Podvislov.

"'Kulachni boi—eto kulakski boi'" (The fist fight is the kulak's fight) was their slogan. They told their neighbours not to come over for the fight. "We have no time for child's play. . . . We have a crop to gather on the steppe."

The valiant Podvislov fighters, nothing daunted, came anyway. But there was no one to fight. The Priankovo men were all in the fields. Coming in at dusk, they changed their scythes for harmonicas and strolled down the road singing a Red Army song.

The Podvislov peasants first scoffed, then looked sheepish, and finally went home.

"And they won't come back," the boy concluded sagely. "It takes two to make a fight."

We came to a cross-road and he got off. Watching him start out with long strides towards his village, I recalled my discouragement of the morning, when I had wondered how the Soviets could ever re-make the peasantry.

I had thought of the revolution in the village as something external, a change being wrought upon a passive inert peasant mass by an outside force.

But there I was wrong. I had forgotten that the men who were leading this transformation had themselves, for the most part, de eloped in a generation or two out

[1] The more prosperous peasants who gained land and power in the village, frequently by sharp dealing and exploitation. They were called "kulak"—which means "fist", because they squeezed their neighbours mercilessly.

[2] Director of Political Section of Machine Tractor Station. See Chapter XII.

of the peasant mass, and that countless new leaders like this young Komsomol were emerging every day.

And most important of all, the mass was made up, not of inert lumps, but of human beings. The aim of the programme was nothing external or alien to them. However much of a change it might represent in method, in aim it expressed their highest aspiration . . . the better life for which they had always striven.

CHAPTER XI

COMPETITION—CAPITALIST AND SOCIALIST

THE BULBOUS RED dome of the Pekhlets church loomed above a clump of trees on the horizon and soon we drew near enough to see the squat ugly little houses that clustered at its base. Arriving in the village we pulled up in front of one of them, labelled in big black and gold letters: "Political Section of the Machine Tractor Station."

Larin, head of the Political Section, had left on horseback at dawn to see how the harvest was progressing on one of the weaker collectives in the district.

"He won't be back till maybe two tomorrow morning," said his Young Communist assistant. He gave us a horse and cart and told us to go wherever we wished. Within fifteen miles of Pekhlets there were thirty-four collective farms. We chose the Neznanovo collective because it was the biggest in Moscow Province and one of the best in the district. There would be plenty of opportunity to see poor farms, making the rounds with Larin next day.

The road wound from one church dome to another, each dome marking a village, each village the centre of at least one collective farm. From some places we could see two or three fat little domes, sticking out over trees or rising along the banks of a lazy river.

At the collective farm office in Neznanovo we found tall, lean, sandy-moustached Vanin, the farm chairman, standing on the step looking anxiously up at the sky. He wore a shiny-visored cap and a neat, factory-made work shirt.

He shook hands and then said, in answer to our question:

"Rye's still too wet to thresh. I'm going out to the field to tell 'em to hold back. Want to come along?"

Vanin was fifty, a semi-literate peasant, astute and experienced enough to manage this 4,400 acre collective farm successfully while others in the district floundered under less capable men. Neznanovo lived well in the winter of 1932–33 while some of its neighbours, with the same kind of land and as much state aid, were kept from hunger only by government grants. Here, as everywhere in the country, success depended largely upon leadership.

Neznanovo was a very large village, 800 families, of which 546 belonged to the collective and the rest were still individual farmers.

Small huts lined the two wide roads and a straggling row of them stood on the low bank of the river. There were a few wooden houses, but wood was scarce here. Most of the huts had thick walls of sun-dried brick made of clay, manure, and straw. They were plastered inside and out with clay and the majority of them were whitewashed. The heavily thatched roofs extending down in low overhanging eaves made them look like giant mushrooms sprung up out of the bright green grass.

Their small windows were decorated with the wooden fretwork characteristic of Central Russia. A number of houses were marked with symbols that looked like trees, or circles with lines radiating from the centre.

Vanin explained that these odd designs were once the sign of the cross painted on the home to protect it from evil spirits. In the present era it was too flagrant a sign of backwardness to believe in evil spirits or the efficacy of the cross in keeping them away, so the symbols had been altered beyond recognition.

A church bell began to toll over the quiet village, reminder that it was Sunday. In Moscow Sunday was no holiday and church bells were silent, but in rural regions the old customs still prevailed. According to Vanin, who did not go to church himself, forty or fifty old people in the village still attended services.

"But today they're in the fields reaping. When the

weather's good and the crop is ripe, religion waits." So it had been even before the revolution, he added.

A herd of cows was grazing at the river's edge, the collective's herd. It supplied milk for the community dining-room (open during the harvest season) and the children's nursery, where 350 children were cared for while their mothers worked in the fields.

"So far only 60 per cent of our members have their own cows. . . . Last year the percentage was much higher but we got many new members this spring and they were mostly poor peasants. After the harvest the collective will advance funds to those who need it so they can buy cows for themselves. Later on they'll pay back the loan."

The slogan "a cow for every collective farmer" had been given out by Stalin that spring as part of the nation-wide campaign to "make every collective farmer well-to-do".

Nearly all members of the collective had chickens, many had hogs or sheep. Each family had an acre or two of land where it raised vegetables for its own use.

We passed the village reading-room, an ordinary peasant hut, empty in this busy season. Its newspapers, periodicals, and books, according to Vanin, were usually in great demand. Every man and woman under forty-five could read. There was still five per cent illiteracy in the village but ten years before, he said, it had been fifty per cent. Even those who were illiterate themselves sent their children to the Seven-Year School.

"Are there classes for adults?"

"Yes," said Vanin. "In winter . . . reading, writing, arithmetic, political economy, Russian literature. . . ."

I visualized the long dark winter nights, peasants tramping across the snow with lanterns to light the way, studying in the lamplight huddled around a stove burning hard cakes of cow-dung and straw because wood was scarce —sitting in the little reading-room in the centre of the steppe studying Marx and mathematics and literature when work in the barns was done.

"You know how it was in the old days," said Vanin. "There was nothing to do in winter. The woman took care of the kids and maybe embroidered a shirt for her man. And the man lay on top of the oven chewing sunflower seeds and spitting at bugs on the wall.

"Now we're becoming cultured and people are ashamed to remain 'dark'."

Field work on the collective was done by brigades of about sixty men and women in charge of a brigade leader. They worked the same section of land from year to year. Each brigade was assigned its "own" horses and farm implements as well, the aim being to give the group a sense of responsibility and pride in its land and equipment.

Competition was keen between brigades—"socialist competition".

"Brigades and sections of brigades compete against each other. But it's for the good of the farm as a whole," Vanin explained. "Every evening brigade leaders and I plan what to do next day and how to improve the work. For instance, one brigade leader tells another how to adjust a seeder so it'll plant better."

Thinking of cut-throat competition and private patents in America, I said:

"Don't you find some of them keeping still, so they can beat the other fellow?"

This seemed ridiculous to Vanin. "But it's no game," he replied soberly. "What are we working for? To make a better farm and get a bigger crop. When the crop's good, all of us get more. It'd be laughable if I wanted the other fellow to work badly so I could win. What would I gain by that?"

Earnest Vanin searched for words to make it clear to my benighted capitalist mind.

"Capitalist competition means to beat down the other fellow. Socialist competition means to do your own work the very best you can and show him how to do as well."

The next day's assignment for each brigade was posted on the bulletin board each night so that every peasant knew what he was going to do and could go right to the job in the morning. In the early days of the collective, Vanin and the brigade leaders had to go around to each house and give instructions to each peasant.

"Lots of times a fellow wanted to do something else and we'd have to argue with him. But now everybody's learned. They elect their brigade leader and they take orders from him. At the end of the day the brigade gets together and everyone has his say about the way the work is going. Then he can argue. But not in the morning!"

"How do they get paid?"

"Partly in money and mostly in products."

A book-keeper in the collective farm office kept a record of each person's workdays. A "workday" was a measurement of work accomplished, not of hours spent on the job. So much land ploughed, so many sheaves tied, so many cows cared for, made a workday. Each job (with a certain few exceptions) had its set norm and the brigade leader reported to the book-keeper each night how much each member of his brigade had accomplished that day.

At the end of the season the collective farm sold to the government, at a fixed low price, a specified amount of grain. This transaction was known as the grain collection. (In return, the farms bought industrial goods from the state, at fixed low prices.) The amount of grain thus sold varied according to soil and climatic conditions, but was a fixed quota, regardless of yield.[1] In Neznanovo, in 1933, it was approximately two-and-a-half bushels per acre.

After selling to the government the collective had to pay the Machine Tractor Station in grain for its services,

[1] This system of grain collections, instituted in early 1933, stimulated efficiency by assuring the collective farms that their quotas for sale to the state would not be increased if they raised a bumper crop or brought new land under cultivation. Previously, in practice, the bigger the crop, the bigger was the collection. This reform was an important factor in solving the agricultural difficulties in 1933.

and lay aside feed for its animals and seed for the following year. The remaining grain was disposed of as the collective wished.

If the crop had been good it would usually vote to sell a certain amount and put up a new barn or club-house or make some other communal investment on the proceeds. The rest was divided up among the peasants according to the number of workdays each had earned. Each peasant in turn set aside what he needed for food and sold the rest at the regular market price to whomever he wished. With the proceeds he made purchases of clothing, bicycles, nickel-plated beds, lumber for a new house, etc.

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The sun was going down when we left Vanin at the edge of the village and turned our horse toward Pekhlets. Peasants were coming in from the fields. Men with scythes over their shoulders were silhouetted against the sky as they topped a rise in the steppe and came down along the darkening fields toward home.

It was late when we pulled into Pekhlets. Night had dropped over that tiny cluster of houses on the steppe—sombre, heavy, black night, with spots a little more dense marking each hut.

A dog barked. Near the church a group of young people had gathered around an accordion and were singing as they strolled down the slope towards the river. There was the flash of a lantern on a light dress and then darkness again, only the vague white of the church dome in the faint starlight and, from somewhere below, a fading melody.

With only the distant stars to guide me I stumbled along the rutted road to the school-teacher's house at the end of the village where we were to spend the night.

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The school-teacher was not at home but his wife, in a clean wash dress and bare feet browned by the sun, welcomed

us. Her two clean little girls, pouring water over our hands while we washed at the kitchen door, watched in wide-eyed amazement as the photographer removed some plates from his camera, and were with great difficulty pried away from us and sent to bed. Neither foreigners nor photographers had ever visited Pekhlets before.

In the corner of the dining-room, decorated with lace curtains and potted rubber plant, the approved interior decoration for city homes, stood the white iron bed of our hostess. This she insisted upon dragging into the other room for me.

I protested that I did not want to deprive her of it. Underlying my self-abnegation was the conviction, born of experience, that bed bugs lurked in the giant feather mattress which was outwardly so clean. But she insisted, and when two canvas bags filled with straw were sent over by Larin for my companions, there was nothing I could do but accept.

After supper the photographer called my attention to a beautifully engraved *Lives of the Saints* lying next to a volume of Lenin on a little table. Too weary to pause over this incongruity, I listened, half asleep, to our hostess telling how she longed for the exciting life of the city. But her husband, she complained, liked the quiet of the steppe. As soon as I could I broke away and went into the other room to go to bed. The bed, incidentally, had been moved into the room occupied by my companions, though there was plenty of space for it in other parts of the house.

Afanasiev had already taken off his shoes and stretched out in his clothes on the mattress in the corner. Polovetsky threw his coat over himself, hooked his arm around his cameras, and fell asleep.

I was more deliberate. I emptied my last case of American bug powder into the folds of the feather bed and carefully wrapped about me the leather coat I had bought a few days before because my friends said leather was bug-resisting. Then I blew out the lamp and, with eyes already half closed, fell asleep as soon as I touched the bed.

But not for long. I woke to find a bug crawling across my eyelid, another skirting the corner of my mouth, dozens more at war over my prostrate body. I squashed the bug in my hurry to get him out of my eyes, swept half a dozen more off my neck, jumped up and struck a match.

By that time there was not a bug in sight. There never are. I hopelessly searched my hair, my arms, my coat, and the spotless feather bed, wishing that my companions would wake up and move over so that I could have part of the floor.

But they slept on. So I sat down on the edge of the bed to wait for dawn, but promptly fell asleep. Some time later the bugs roused me again and I repeated the process, too dull with fatigue and sleep to think of anything except battling the enemy on the home grounds.

At the first grey hint of dawn, a great idea finally evolved in my tired brain. I went out to the haystack where I slept blissfully undisturbed till my companions wakened me to start a new day.

CHAPTER XII

"A CAMPAIGN . . . UNPARALLELED IN THE PEACE-TIME ANNALS OF ANY GOVERNMENT"

MY INTEREST THROUGHOUT the book has been not in generalizations or in institutions, but in people. One institution, however,—the Political Section of the Machine Tractor Station—must be dealt with to some extent because it played so large a part in the lives of collective farmers and Soviet farm officials.

It is probably safe to say that the Political Sections contributed more than any other single factor to the solution of the critical food situation of 1932–33, and thereby they clinched the victory of collective over individual farming on one-sixth of the world's land area.

Although, having served their purpose, the Political Sections in agriculture have been "liquidated", they are highly significant as an example of the Communist Party's method in mobilizing the best abilities and resources of the country in the face of danger.

The 2,500 picked men whom the Communist Party sent out to head the Political Sections in 1933 gave an outstanding example of that "Vocation of Leadership" which Sidney and Beatrice Webb have called "the dominant political feature of Soviet Communism".

I had exceptional opportunities to watch the work of the political sections from the inside in the crucial year 1933, and again in 1934 when the gains of the preceding year were being consolidated. A friend was director of the Plavsk (Moscow Province) Political Section and I lived for a month in his home, watching his work. In addition, I

observed Political Sections in action in the Crimea, in the North Caucasus and in the Korablino District of Moscow Province.

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The 1932 harvest made it clear that the country's food supply was seriously imperilled by the difficulties experienced in Soviet agriculture. Hunger was again felt in various parts of Russia as it had been periodically throughout that country's history.

The reasons were many; kulak opposition; peasant inefficiency; unfavourable weather conditions; a system of grain collections under which, in practice, the diligent peasants were burdened by the failures of the recalcitrant or lazy ones; falsification of crop yield estimates; the mistakes and stupidities of over-zealous Communists pushing collectivization faster than the peasants would take it; the inability of industry to supply the promised agricultural machinery as rapidly as new collective farms needed them; the shortage of consumers' goods which left the peasant little incentive to produce grain for the market, etc. . . .

Soviet agriculture had reached a critical stage. Drastic action had to be taken quickly. Early in 1933 the Communist Party adopted a programme which the Webbs describe as " . . . a campaign which for boldness of conception and vigour in execution, as well as in the magnitude of its operations, appears to us unparalleled in the peace-time annals of any government."

The key move in this campaign was the creation of new administrative organs to insure the prompt execution of government policy—the Political Sections of the Machine Tractor Stations. Some 2,500 carefully picked Communists were called to Moscow, instructed by L. M. Kaganovich, "Stalin's right-hand man", and in the space of a few days, in the early spring, sent to every corner of the country to become directors of the new Political Sections.

Their job was summed up in the terse slogan: " . . . make the collective farms Bolshevik and the collective farmers

well-to-do." More explicitly, they were to make sure that district officials, village Soviets, Machine Tractor Station staffs, a quarter of a million collective farm chairmen and 15,000,000 collective farm families did the work they were responsible for to bring in a good crop.

These 2,500 Communists were trained, experienced, capable leaders, men whom the Soviet government had been using since the revolution on its most vital jobs. No sooner was the crisis passed in one phase of Soviet life than they were switched to another crucial situation, to tighten it up . . . they were key men in a rapidly developing country suffering from a woeful lack of leaders. Their last jobs had been, for the most part, in industry. Now industry was on its feet and they were rushed into agriculture.

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So it was with considerable anticipation that I sat in the little office of the Korablino Political Section at six o'clock this August morning, waiting to meet the man on whom so much depended—Director Larin.

He was at the phone, a tall, tanned, serious fellow in horn-rimmed glasses. The photographer, who took an almost personal pride in every mark of Soviet progress, called my attention to the fact that Larin was freshly shaven although he had not returned home till two that morning, and that his white blouse was immaculate. "Even in such little things he's setting the peasants an example."

For one who had had only a few hours' sleep after sixteen hours in the saddle, Larin seemed remarkably fresh and alert. He looked like a man with tremendous physical and nervous endurance. His face was lean and strong, and he spoke with the quiet assurance of one accustomed to lead.

I had expected to find at least one assistant with him, but his aides were already out on the steppe. There was only a clumsy-looking peasant boy to take messages in Larin's absence, and a succession of peasants who came in for advice from the "Comrade Director".

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The Comrade Director looked to be about thirty; later I learned he was only twenty-six. Even in the Soviet Union twenty-six was young for such a responsible job. But life had trained him well to meet new and difficult situations.

At the age of eight he had run away from home. As a bezprizorni (homeless waif) he had ridden freight cars the length and breadth of Russia, living by his wits and his agile young limbs. When he was eleven, in 1918, some of his older friends among the "wandering boys" joined the Young Communists, and he too was soon admitted despite his youth.

The Komsomols literally brought him up . . . taught him to wash behind his ears, to sleep in a bed, to stick to a job till it was done, to work with other people, to lead men.

All this I learned later, much of it from the Director's young wife who had come down from Moscow to help him organize the peasant women. He was loth to talk about himself and I did not feel justified, in this busy season, in pressing him for details.

His telephone conversation ended, Larin turned to shake hands with us.

"Threshing starts tomorrow," he said in answer to our question. "Three days of rain have held us back but now the grain's dry enough to begin."

He pointed to the shiny new barometer which registered "Fair". It and the telephone were the most important equipment in this "office", formerly a kulak's bedroom. The furniture was simple; a rough desk, a plank table covered with red bunting, a picture of Stalin and a wall chart showing the progress of ploughing, sowing, and reaping on Korablino district's thirty-four collective farms.

Every few minutes the telephone rang and the Comrade Director talked briefly with some farm chairman out on the steppe.

"Lumber for the threshing shed? Yes, it arrived this morning. Send your men for it."

To another: "Stepanov is on the way with the tractor parts you need."

To a third: "Come to Pekhlets this afternoon. The agronomist will demonstrate what to do with wet grain."

The mere fact of a telephone in Pekhlets meant a giant's stride away from the past. Only seventeen of the surrounding collective farms had phones but from them messages could be relayed to all the others in the district with a swiftness unheard of a few months before.

There was, as yet, not one automobile in the district. But that slender telephone wire was a nerve linking the most backward collective farm with Moscow—the centre from which moved out, in endless waves, the ideas, men and machines that were re-making the Russian countryside. The "deaf steppe", as the Russians called those regions out of contact with the centre, was beginning to hear.

Larin was proud of the speed and efficiency the telephone enabled the Political Section to bring into Soviet administration.

"Toward the end of sowing we ran short of seed and phoned Moscow for three more carloads. Got them without any delay just by saying the call was about spring sowing. They called back that the cars would be down by express at eleven-thirty that same night. I phoned the collective farm chairman to have wagons at the station by five next morning to get the seed. By nine o'clock they were back in the villages. By noon the seed was planted. I kept in touch by phone.

"Before . . . there wouldn't have been a telephone in any of these 'dark' villages. And no one would have cared whether the peasants had seed or not." He laughed exultantly. "Now everything waits on the peasant's crop. Up in Moscow they're right on the job. Last year the chair-warmers would have pigeon-holed such a request or handed it around from one bureau to another for weeks.

Now—they have three carloads of seed consigned to me within an hour. The railroads shunt other freight to the sidings and ship seed down 'express'.

"Peasants who last year would have shrugged and said 'tomorrow', get up in the middle of the night to go after seed. Everything waits while they sow. And they can't slow up because I'm right behind them, pushing all the time. That's bringing tempo to the villages!"

The Political Section had introduced other innovations in the time-hallowed working habits of the peasants. Haying was started when the flowering was at its height instead of after it was over. Despite the forebodings of peasant elders, the results were excellent.

Rye reaping also began earlier than ever before.

"The peasants used to wait till the grain was dead ripe. That was all right for a five-acre crop. They could reap the whole thing in two days. But if we had waited with thousands of acres, a lot of the grain would have been dropping off before we finished.

"It was hard to put over. But we got the best crop ever reaped in this region. We're hoping to take first prize in Moscow Province on our rye."

For my benefit, because he thought a "bourgeois American" might not understand the significance of these changes, Larin amplified:

"It's not just a good crop we're getting. We're building socialism."

Socialism could never become a reality in an impoverished land, he said.

"We're ending the 'idiocy of village life' that Lenin wrote about. We're helping the peasant obtain a better standard of living. Without it he cannot achieve the high cultural level necessary to make the socialist society."

A Political Section Director had little time to speculate about the future at this season of the year. Larin came back to the present.

"Planning ahead" was the watchword in Korablino.

The work on each farm was outlined in detail before it started. Three weeks before reaping began, chairmen of all collective farms had come to Pekhlets to confer with Larin, the agricultural experts, and half a dozen weather-beaten old peasants who had farmed in the district for forty years. Together they had made out a detailed plan for harvesting on each of the thirty-four Korablino farms. Copies had been mimeographed and given to leaders of brigades. Long before the grain was ripe every man and woman knew just where he was to work, what machines and horses he would use, how much he was expected to do.

A quiet little peasant had come in while we were talking, and sat down beside Larin's table. He swished the flies away from his sallow face with a dusty cap.

"You want to see me, Shuvaev?" asked Larin, shaking hands with him.

"It's like this, Comrade Director. The cook for the harvest field kitchen laid aside a little meat that was supposed to go into the soup . . ."

"Let's see, that's Popov, isn't it?"

"Yes. The others say he was going to take it for himself. They want to put him out of the collective."

"Did he take it?"

"Naw," drawled Shuvaev. "I told them they were too hard on him. No use blaming a man before he's sinned. I was coming over this way. Thought I'd stop in and see what you think about it."

"He's always been honest, hasn't he?"

Shuvaev nodded.

"Put him out of the kitchen into the field," advised Larin. "But don't kick him out altogether. He's a good worker and you need him."

"Yes. That's just what I told them. Well, thanks, I'll be going now."

Shuvaev pulled his quiet self off the bench and went out. Through the window I saw him drive off in a rickety cart behind a half-starved horse.

"What's behind that story?" I asked.

Larin smiled grimly: "Behind that is a three-year fight by a bunch of good, honest hard-working members of Red Star Collective Farm to get out from under the thumb of a couple of really smart kulaks. They've had so much trouble they're skittish—too ready to jump at the slightest hint of crookedness."

On his first tour of the district, Larin had found Red Star Collective Farm thoroughly demoralized. There was no time to waste. His job at that time was "to decide, not to advise".

He had six saboteurs arrested,[1] called a collective farm meeting and demonstrated that a stronger farm chairman would have saved the situation. A new one was elected. He lifted two Communists out of another farm and installed them at Red Star as brigade leaders. He got fodder for the animals and food for peasants who faced a hungry spring. By the time sowing began, Red Star was on its feet again.

Larin inspected every village in the Korablino District. He spent 18 hours a day in the saddle at first, riding from farm to farm, ordering supplies, getting rid of trouble-makers, reorganizing, encouraging, stimulating.

Later I heard the story of one of these farm meetings from an assistant of Larin's.

Larin arrived at the Lenin's Path Collective Farm on the eve of the sowing. Soil had been poorly prepared, brigades were badly organized. Most of the members were completely demoralized by the farm's troubles of the previous year. Larin learned the situation and bluntly gave instructions.

The peasants grumbled. He wanted too much planted. There was not enough seed, not enough horses, not enough time. Larin said he would get seed, get more tractors, organize the field brigades so that the work could be done. Still they grumbled. He became stern.

[1] For a detailed story of a kulak saboteur see chapter on "Kulak Politics in the Village Soviet".

"All right. You don't want to work? I'll get the men from the neighbouring village to sow your land. But if they do they'll get the crop too. Where will you be next year? Worse off than you are now!"

They scratched their heads uneasily. Certainly the mistakes of last year must not be repeated. While they pondered Larin cracked a joke. Somebody laughed. In the back of the room a stocky peasant woman rose decisively to her feet. She shouted over the hubbub:

"Men from Moscow have been here before to tell us how to do things. Always they made my head ache with their long speeches. They talk and talk, and when they finish, you don't know what they've been talking about.

"But this one knows what's to be done. What he says is right and you all know it. He doesn't waste time on palaver. And he isn't too stuck on himself to have a laugh once in a while."

She raised her arm and pointed at Larin. "I'm for him. I'll go to the fields today. How about the rest of you?"

First one, then another, rose to his feet, till the whole room was standing. From that day they were for him, and they began to call him familiarly, "Comrade Director."

CHAPTER XIII

THE BIGGEST HARVEST RUSSIA EVER HAD

WE FOLLOWED LARIN over the steppe in the morning, he sitting his horse like a cavalryman, we bumping along less gracefully but almost as fast in a two-wheeled cart.

Afanasiev, the Communist reporter, always looking for an opportunity to emphasize his own importance, recalled an incident of the previous day:

"Did you notice yesterday how embarrassed Larin was when I told him I joined the party a whole year before he did?" he began.

Afanasiev was the kind of poor party member who would return to Moscow and boast about what "we Communists have accomplished in the villages". He would look down, of course, upon non-Communists who, he thought, had no part in these achievements. He had attempted to constitute himself a sort of unofficial censor for me to direct my attention exclusively to the favourable features of the farms we visited, and to cut short my talks with peasants who grumbled about hardships, a course which neither Larin nor any other responsible Communists in the district felt needful.

So I assured Afanasiev that I had detected no embarrassment in Larin's manner, and added a little about my low opinion of Communists who took unto themselves credit for party achievements for which more able and self-sacrificing men were responsible.

Ahead of us Larin left the road periodically to look at the grain or talk to peasants at work in the fields. We followed him to a section where the last of the rye was being reaped.

No machines here. Korablino was still poor in modern equipment. Collectivization had brought, as yet, only seventeen tractors to serve the district's thirty four farms. All of them were being used for the heavier work of ploughing and threshing. In this fifth harvest since large-scale collectivization got under way, all the grain was still reaped by hand as it had been for centuries.[1] I stood up in the cart to get a better look at the lively scene.

Thirty peasants were moving steadily across the field, mowing down the golden grain. Their scythes flashed rhythmically in the sun as they sheared off strips about four feet wide and ten to twelve feet long.

Behind them came the women, bent double, deftly twisting short bands of straw and binding the grain into firm sheaves. Swiftly they tossed the sheaves into piles and moved on, leaving the dark brown earth bare under its sparse covering of stubble.

It was a beautiful harvest picture—tall waving grain and small human figures moving quickly under the blue sky. The scene in *Anna Karenina* where Tolstoy described the reaping of the grain came to mind, and for a second I regretted that this picturesque method must give way to noisy, tractor-drawn reapers.

"Picturesque and obsolete," grunted Polovetsky, focusing his camera on Tuzhikov, the pride of the farm.

Tuzhikov was a big blond fellow in bast shoes and loose blouse belted at the waist. His scythe moved back and forth in a beautiful, tireless, easy swing. Nothing broke the rhythm or marred the evenness of the close-clipped golden stubble he left behind him.

I noticed other peasants watching him, trying vainly to keep up with his speed. The best reaper was always an honoured man in the Russian village. The kerchiefed mother of the famous Soviet flier Vodopianov, whom we met on

[1] As late as 1928 half the harvesting and threshing and three-fourths of the sowing in the entire USSR was done by hand. One-third of the peasants at that time still used wooden ploughs.

the train going to Korablino, had told us of her son but boasted that her distinguished son's father had reaped nearly two acres of grain a day in his prime. Tuzhikov reaped nearly 2½ acres a day, the record for the Soviet Union at the time.

In the strip next to Tuzhikov, Saratova, a woman brigade leader, was cutting with a sickle the uneven stubble left by some reaper less skilled than he. She straightened up easily as we approached and looked out from under her smooth brow at the heads of thirty men barely seen over the top of the rye. Triumph was in her clear grey eyes and in her voice.

"What a crop! We learned our lesson last year. The fields were so poorly ploughed it was a shame to see. But this year the ground was worked up soft and light and the seed cleaned and sown early." She thought the individual farmers were fools for not joining the collective, and pointed to the grain for substantiation.

"Look at that crop! No individual farmer around here can match it. We'll be well-to-do when the harvest is in!"

She bent over to tighten the cord of her bast shoe. Then she wiped the perspiration from her forehead with the back of her hand and, with a parting smile at us, went back to work.

We got to the village in time to see three or four brigades coming in for dinner and a wagon loading up with kegs of food for workers in the farthest fields.

The communal dining-room, operated as yet only during the harvest season, was a cool, airy shed open on four sides, with tables for about two hundred people. The collective farmers were coming in, men carrying scythes over their shoulders, swinging along in the easy way of people used to the earth. As they took their seats there was a good-natured scramble for places. Brigade leaders stood around talking about the progress of the morning's work.

After dinner the women looked into the nursery to see how their children were getting along or went down to the river to wash clothes.

"We women still have a double job," one of them told me, squatting barefoot on a stone at the edge of the river while she pounded her clothes with a heavy wooden paddle.

"We have to wash clothes and bake bread as usual. Only one meal a day is served in the dining-room.

"Before the collective it was even worse. If we didn't have a grandmother to watch the kids we took them to the field with us and left the poor little things in the hot sun all day. Now they're in the nursery and we don't have to worry about them.

"They say next year we'll have a bakery that'll make bread for everybody. That's a wonderful thing! And some of the women talk about a laundry for washing clothes, like they have in cities. It's done by machine. Think of that! Did you ever see one?"

She squinted up at me, a sun-burned peasant woman who two or three years before had probably never seen the simplest kind of a machine. "If we get that we'll really be equal with the men."

. . . . .

Most of the rye in the district was still too wet to thresh. But the Voroshilov farm was due to start that afternoon. We rode over to see it. All morning men had been bringing the grain in wagon-loads to the threshing shed. At three in the afternoon when we arrived they were almost ready to begin.

Men on wagons were pitching the sheaves into a great pile beside the thresher, ready to feed into the machine. The mechanic was trying the motor.

Bannikov, the young collective farm chairman, hurried out of the barn where he had been inspecting the scales. He looked over the sacks to make sure all were mended. He pushed his cap with the broken vizor back on his forehead and wiped his brow with his sleeve. Excitement, more than sun, made him perspire.

Was the thresher ready, he asked. The mechanic, only

slightly less worried, replied that the thresher was "capricious". Bannikov swore gently under his breath, then rushed into the barn again for another look at the fanning mill which was to clean the grain.

Bannikov was a new farm chairman, chosen after the previous one and three cronies had been jailed for embezzling. Everybody looked to him for guidance. This day was to turn their fortunes to a better road. The harvest had always been the climax to the peasants' year. If it was good they would have enough to eat. If it was bad they would go hungry for a season. This year in particular the results of the threshing were eagerly awaited, for this bumper crop promised to bring their first really successful harvest under collectivization, and collectivization promised a new life for them all.

Not far from the barn a dozen women sat under a tree chewing straws and gossiping noisily as they waited for the threshing to begin. One buxom lass lay with her head in her friend's lap while the other skilfully searched her hair and mechanically cracked lice between her thumb nails as they talked.

One of the women called Larin over to them. Seeing three strangers with him, she shouted:

"One of you wouldn't be a doctor by any chance?"

"No."

"Anybody sick?" Larin inquired.

"Yes. Makeeva. She was so hungry she ate too many cucumbers."

"Bad," murmured Larin.

They gathered around us, twelve peasant women in bast shoes and full skirts, tightening up kerchiefs with calloused fingers. One was about fifty, wrinkled and leathery. Another, with blonde curly hair, pink cheeks, red lips, was as pretty as any magazine-cover girl, with a vivid beauty unusual in Russian peasant women.

When they were all standing the leathery-faced woman spoke:

"How about it, Comrade Director. Do we get any of today's grain?"

They drew closer, suddenly serious. Apparently this question had been discussed in advance.

"You know you've got to give the first grain to the government," replied Larin, just as seriously. The law was that one-tenth of the government quota must be delivered first. Only thereafter might the peasants get an advance on their share of the collective harvest.

The women murmured that it had been a hard spring. Last year's harvest was bad. "Cucumbers from the garden aren't enough," they said.

"Cucumbers have lots of vitamins," said Larin with a friendly grin, biting into one that was offered him. "Where'd you get such a good one?"

They brought him back to the subject.

"We'll grind it ourselves," said one.

"What? You don't know how to grind!" he teased.

They laughed. They gave him another argument. He parried it. Then he turned aside another questioner with a joke. All the time he continued chewing the juicy cucumber.

Earlier, feeling hungry myself, I had asked Larin why he did not take some sandwiches with him when he rode out for a long day. He had replied, simply:

"Sometimes I do. But this farm is on lean rations. I can't eat when the peasants have nothing to take to the fields with them."

I knew he was working himself to the limit to make the peasants' lot better. He would return to Pekhlets late at night on an exhausted horse, and his lamp would burn through the remaining darkness while he pondered over difficulties that must be settled before dawn.

But now he refused to listen to difficulties. And the women, to my great surprise, adjusted themselves to his mood. The pretty blonde made a smart retort when he challenged her for taking the tractorist's attention away

from his work. The leathery-faced woman guffawed at his sly dig at her eternally whining neighbour. They smiled and chuckled to themselves. In ten minutes Larin took them from complaint to laughter. When he was called away to look at the thresher they looked affectionately at his lean figure in the blue embroidered blouse.

I stood there not liking his skill at repartee, thinking, at first, that he was completely callous if he could crack jokes when people asked for bread. But as I watched his face and the faces of the women I caught a glimpse of the understanding that existed between them despite the seeming conflict. The banter was as superficial as the apparent conflict of purpose. It was the keeping up of spirits after the medicine had been given and the patient on the way to recovery. Obviously Larin's efforts to help these people were more valuable than my quick and easy sympathy. My resentment faded away.

The leather-faced woman turned to me as Larin was lost to view behind the thresher.

"If it hadn't been for him we'd have been lost this spring. When he came down our village was almost out of bread. Larin got bread for us. He got us seed and fertilizer. But we were plenty hungry all right. See!" She pulled out the folds of her blouse to show how loosely it hung on her. "I lost twenty-five pounds this winter. I used to be nice and fat." The other women nodded confirmation.

"Yes," she went on, "he's a good director, Larin. Things haven't been easy but he did all he could."

. . . . .

Over at the thresher the man in charge shouts to the tractor operator that the machine is ready. "Give her the gas!" The latter shouts back "O.K.", and grabs the crank to start the motor. Men and women hurry to their places, the tractor sputters into action, glides into a smooth rumble. I climb up on a grain wagon to see better, stirred by the excitement in the faces and movements of the peasants.

The thresher is a huge, cumbersome old model of German make, imported before the World War. It has no mechanical feed, so four persons are required to get the sheaves into the thresher, work which one could accomplish on a more modern machine. It has no "blower" to eject the straw, so five people are kept busy getting it out of the way. A modern machine would accomplish this entirely without human aid.

Larin shakes his head ruefully at this inefficient use of labour power. "Wait till next year," he says. "We'll get a couple of new threshers from the Rosselmash Plant, patterned after your American models. Then we'll show you how to thresh!"

Three women up on the high bridge of the thresher pass the sheaves to the young farm chairman who stands in the key position, feeding in the grain, speeding the others, encouraging, correcting. He works with regular clock-like movements; with every sweep of his arms he grabs a sheaf, jerks loose the twisted straw binding and flings the loose grain into the machine.

"Davai! Davai!" shouted the tractor man exultantly. "Open her up!" He pulls down the gas lever another notch. He grins, jerks up his chin in a challenge. The women laugh excitedly as they speed up. This is more grain than they have seen in a year. It means the end of the lean days. Bannikov, the chairman, loses his worried frown and joyously shoves the grain into the maw of the thresher.

Down at the bottom of the machine's big grain hopper, three small doors are opened and three grades of rye come spilling into the sacks. Behind it, women are tossing the straw away as it is spat on to the ground. They pile it up, tighten rope slings around the great piles of it; two little boys trot away on horses, dragging bunches of straw and stirring up a cloud of dust.

An old greybeard standing beside the sacks to pull them away as they are filled, touches his tongue to the grain

smells it, squeezes a handful, rubs it between his fingers. He shakes his head admiringly as Larin comes up.

"Good rye," he says reverently.

"Good rye," agrees Larin. He throws a heavy sack of it on to his broad shoulders and carries it into the barn.

In the barn the leathery-faced woman shouts: "Come on, you young ones. We've got to get this grain cleaned and away to the station. Then we'll get ours."

It was impossible to stand idly by and watch. I dropped down on my knees with the other women and began to pick out the bits of chaff which the crude fanning mill had failed to remove from the grain.

Threshing went on steadily till two o'clock in the morning. When darkness had fallen on the steppe the previous night, it had seemed to me a pall that obliterated all life. But here in the light of lanterns, the most exciting work of the year continued unabated.

Six tons of rye were threshed, cleaned and loaded on the little peasant wagons. With the Russian's never-failing sense for the dramatic, which often makes him seem inefficient if not downright ridiculous to prosaic Americans, all the wagons were held till the last was loaded. Then Bannikov hastily draped a piece of festive red bunting over the first load and the "Red Caravan" moved slowly out and was swallowed up in the thick darkness of the steppe. Immediately afterward, a fifth of a ton of rye was loaded on other wagons and taken to the collective farm granary. Next day it would be distributed among the peasants as an advance on their share of the crop.

My two companions and I started out on our little cart behind the "Red Caravan". As we left the range of the lantern glow we heard Bannikov and Larin talking in low tired voices, checking up on the day's work and pointing out where tomorrow it could be better. Rounding the corner near the church we heard faint singing as the peasants started home. A new era was dawning in the village.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MAKING OF A BOLSHEVIK

NATASHIN WAS ANOTHER one of the "picked men", chosen to head a Political Section of a Machine Tractor Station. Him I knew well, since the day I arrived in Moscow and he came into my hotel room by mistake and rumbled through his thick black beard: "Hah—ahr—you?"

He was looking for my neighbour, a tourist whom he did not know but who knew his sister in Chicago. So I introduced them and remained to act as interpreter. By the time the tourist returned to America I was good friends with Natashin and his wife.

He had a figure like a bear, and merry green eyes and a laugh that began deep down in his chest and rumbled up into an explosion startling and infectious. He took a boyish delight in mechanical gadgets like my cigarette lighter, and when I showed him how to work the tricky lock on my suitcase, he was as pleased as a youngster with a new toy.

But the best thing about him was his beard. It made him look just like my notion of what a Russian revolutionary should look, and I labelled him at once, "the Bolshevik."

It was a long time before I realized what a good Bolshevik he was. He was then secretary of the Communist Party nucleus in a large factory just outside Moscow. But that meant little to me at first.

He did not talk about his work. Not because he was not interested. I found later that he rarely left his job before nine, ten, or eleven o'clock in the evening. But there were a thousand things about America he wanted to know . . .

what were the latest radio sets like, and how popular was Sinclair Lewis; how were factories organized and what was new in the cinema; did the masses dance the fox-trot ("fawks trawt") and what was the strength of the revolutionary movement.

When he tired of asking questions he would burst forth with a tremendous "Oh—Suzannah" which he had learned from an American phonograph record. He did not know more than three words of English but that bothered him not at all. He mimicked the sounds and got the tune and had a very merry time. He had a wife and two children but he reminded me, often, of a boisterous fourteen-year-old cousin I had at home.

I had thought that a Bolshevik would give me lectures on the Five-Year Plan and frown because I was politically illiterate. And I had suggested quite seriously to some of my friends before I left America, that they send me the *New Yorker* so that I would not forget there was lightness and humour in the world. But Natashin gave no lectures, and he was far more entertaining than the most amusing American magazine.

I had not been at the Natashins' in several weeks when I rang their doorbell one night in March, 1933, and was greeted by Natashin himself, who at eight in the evening was usually still at the factory.

"Hah—ahr—you?" he boomed.

"How do you happen to be home so early?" I asked.

He led me into another room where a half-filled suitcase stood under a green-shaded lamp. Beside it, his wife, Nadia, plump as the Russians like their women, was running her finger into the toe of a sock.

Natashin dived into a trunk and came up with a pair of boots.

"I'm being sent to the provinces to work."

"What kind of work?"

"What's the country's biggest problem today?"

I knew the answer. Agriculture was the biggest problem.

Natashin was going out to head a political section. He nodded.

I thought of those villages I had seen on the steppe, still and inexpressibly lonely when night fell and shut them off from everything except the distant stars. Natashin loved city lights and the theatre and gay evenings at supper with friends and cognac. He was, moreover, extremely fond of his family, and they were to remain in Moscow.

"How do you feel about going?" I asked.

"Glad. It's important work."

"Sorry to leave Moscow?"

"Moscow isn't the only place to live."

"What does your wife think of your leaving?"

"My wife has her work too."

His wife held a minor position in the Commissariat of Agriculture. She used to discuss seed selection with Natashin.

"That's a Communist's life," Nadia put in with a calm smile. "He's in Moscow and then he's in Kharkov. He's in Odessa and then in some village in the Caucasus. I married him when he passed through our town with the Red Army during the Civil War. For three years I saw him only when the fighting was near enough for him to come on horseback at night. Our first child was six months old before I knew whether her father was dead or alive.

"It's a Communist's life," she repeated, philosophically.

"It's a good life," he added.

. . . . .

So Natashin went down to Plavsk in the south-west corner of Moscow Province and I learned something about him from his quiet wife, Nadia.

He was the son of a small-town Jewish tailor in the Ukraine who spent his boyhood playing pranks on the townsfolk and embarrassing his respectable parents. He would not work and he would not study. At eighteen he

fled to Astrakhan to escape military service in the Tsar's army, then being battered to pieces in the World War.

There he fell in with a gang of young rowdies and continued his merry existence. Each one took turns working to pay for lodging for the crowd while the rest filched food from the Volga steamers and wine from merchants on the market-place. Life was gay and carefree.

Then came news of the revolution. The army was no longer fighting for the Tsar but for what Natashin, in his youthful enthusiasm, called "the people". His imagination was fired. He jumped on a freight train and rode home to report for military duty. Immediately he was sent to the trenches.

Between the February and October revolutions the army was in a turmoil. Men were tired of fighting. The revolution had not brought peace. Political battles taking place in Petrograd had their counterpart in the trenches, where soldiers hotly argued the merits of the Provisional Government as against the claims of the Bolsheviks. Natashin took sides with the Bolsheviks, became a party organizer among the fighting men, was sent from the front to Moscow as a delegate to the first Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

When Russia made peace with the foreign enemy he graduated into civil war, fighting first with the ragged Red Partisans, later with the better organized Red Army. His wife first met him in the Red Partisan days when he came to their small town, where she was living with her sister, married to Natashin's brother.

"He came to the door with a ragged beard, dirty face and torn clothes, and asked for my brother-in-law. I thought he was some kind of a bandit," she laughed. "The town was changing hands every few days and we never knew who was going to rob us next." She slammed the door in his face and ran in fright to tell her brother-in-law what had happened.

Natashin, already a Communist, had been trapped when

the Whites took over the town and he was in danger of his life. They hid him in a cellar for two weeks till the excitement of the Bolshevik evacuation had died down. Then, decked out like a middle-class merchant, with a heavy gold watch-chain across his chest, Natashin bought a railroad ticket and rode out of enemy territory to rejoin the Red Army.

When the fighting was near he used to come dashing on horseback into the town at night, risking his life for a few hours with Nadia. On one of these hurried trips they were married, despite much objection from Nadia's family.

"She is a cultured girl with a beautiful voice. And who is he?—An uncouth youth who never read a book!" But Nadia knew her own mind and heart.

In 1920 Natashin was in one of the divisions that after long and bitter fighting drove the last White general, Wrangel, past the neck of the Crimean peninsula and off Russian soil for ever. By that time he was a mature individual. He put aside his gun and plunged into the work of reconstruction. He held various positions of importance, one of them as Chief Prosecutor of the Black Sea Fleet. Like all good Communists he studied, gradually becoming an educated man as well as a leader of men.

. . . . .

Natashin came up to Moscow during the summer on business for the Political Section. He had a tan in place of the beard, and he closed his fist and extended his thumb skyward when I asked him how things were. A Russian thumb turned up from a closed fist means "top of the world". Accompanied with a sturdy "Vo" in the lower regions of the chest, it means "top of the world and then some."

He was as enthusiastic as a boy engrossed in a new game. All my questions about his other work he had deflected, not because he was secretive or modest but because he was

too much interested in other things to dwell on what he was doing. But now the thrill of a new and exciting job led him to talk.

His Political Section was in the south-west corner of Moscow Province in a small town called Plavsk. There were 55 farms in the Machine Tractor Station area, 30,000 people and about 70,000 acres of grain land.[1]

Natashin had three regular assistants who, like him, covered the district on horseback. There was a newspaper, the *Politotdelets*, coming out twice weekly, pushing education and farming efficiency among the peasants. Natashin was full of figures about ploughing schedules and planting and crop prospects. But what he dwelt on were the people he was working with.

"I came to a farm where the president was an habitual drunkard. First time I arrived he was drinking to commemorate the funeral of his wife. Well, a man's got to have some consolation. But five days later, on the evening scheduled for the new farm elections, he was on a spree celebrating his second marriage."

So they went ahead without him. The peasants nominated another weakling. Natashin, whose business it was to see that the right man was chosen for the responsible job of collective farm chairman, rose and told them that a poor president meant less bread and less meat for them. They elected a good man.

"But you ought to see the women down there! They're ahead of the men. Why? I've wondered a lot myself.

[1] The Plavsk Political Section had jurisdiction only over the fifty-five collective farms served by the Machine Tractor Station (M.T.S.). The Station did not as yet have sufficient facilities to serve the other 145 collective farms of the district (rayon). These remained under the general guidance of the District Executive Committee (an elected body whose closest American parallel is the county board of supervisors), and of the District Party Committee.

In Plavsk district, as in general throughout the country, the activities conducted by the Political Section were to a lesser degree duplicated by these local bodies. Since, however, they had fewer facilities and a generally lower calibre of personnel than the Political Section, their work was apt to be less efficient. In some cases, overlapping of function and authority gave rise to friction between local officials and Political Directors.

Probably they've felt oppression more—seen their children suffer from illness and grow up without schooling. The mujik could drink and forget his troubles. But the peasant woman couldn't get away from hungry children. I think maybe because they're not fighting just for themselves, they fight so hard.

"When we arrived in Plavsk we were assigned a certain building for the Political Section headquarters. When I came to take it over an irate, red-faced woman, who had gotten there first, challenged me on the doorstep. She was head of the children's nursery and she needed the building. She wasn't going to give it up to the Political Section or any other organization!"

So they went inside and talked it over. The woman admitted readily enough that she would resent it if she had been assigned a building and someone else took it. Natashin agreed that the children needed *some* building. The upshot of it was that he volunteered to move into other quarters and the nursery was housed where she wanted it.

"What good would it do me to have a good office and the ill-will of the people I'm working with. The building's not the important thing.

"The important thing," said this manager of men, "is that she was fighting for the children, not for herself. They weren't hers. She doesn't have any. But she put up a battle for their rights just as she would if they'd been her own. *That's* the achievement."

Natashin was proud. He invited me to come down and see for myself.

CHAPTER XV

CULTURE—BY-PRODUCT OF COLLECTIVIZATION

IT WAS MARCH, 1934, before I went down to Plavsk to see Natashin on the job. He had come up to Moscow on a flying trip for the Political Section, and took me back with him. We boarded the train at midnight and a few minutes later the Bolshevik was showing me how to tuck my felt boots under my head on the "hard" bench of the third-class coach.

"They don't make a bad pillow, and you're sure of having them in the morning. My assistant came up to Moscow a couple of weeks ago and put his boots on the floor for the night. When he woke up they were gone. Imagine arriving in Moscow at thirty-five below zero in your stocking feet!" He climbed to the shelf above me, where I heard him pulling off his boots and tucking them away for safe-keeping.

At seven the next morning we got off the train. The station was a solitary building in the middle of the lonesome steppe, several miles away from the town it was supposed to serve. We bundled up in the sleigh that had come for us and flew across the snow, sparkling white and beautiful in the bright morning sun.

Ahead of us, on a bluff above the frozen river, stood a high-columned white mansion flanked by dark trees, the former seat of the Princess Gagarina. Near it rose a gorgeous deep-blue church dome studded with golden stars. We sped through a great stone gateway beside the church, and through a park of frosted fir trees up to Natashin's house.

It was a snug little brick bungalow built to house the Princess' coachman.

"And it's got electricity," Natashin added. "They say Plavsk had electricity when no other town in all Russia had it except 'Tsarskoe Selo', the Tsar's village."

The Princess Gagarina had been a Baptist, not an orthodox Russian believer. She wanted to convert the peasants, so she played the Lady Bountiful in order to win their gratitude. . . . She built a big hospital and had the houses wired for electricity.

Two rooms of Natashin's four had been closed for the winter to make heating easier, but no fires were going and the house was freezing cold. We warmed ourselves with tea brewed on a kerosene stove and hurried out again.

Natashin had to go directly to the Political Section. But I wanted to see the town. So he warned me not to get lost in the metropolis and left me to myself.

At first glance Plavsk looked like one of the sleepy little provincial towns of Chekhov's thwarted heroines.

A wide market-place on the low bank of the river was flanked by trading stalls and a long block of little stores and offices. The market and streets were empty. Smoke from the chimney of a little factory drifted over the top of a faded green hotel.

Secure and superior on their high bank, the manor house and big church seemed to look down with contempt on this dingy "business section". Behind these haughty landmarks a few two-story brick buildings accentuated the drabness and poverty of the small huts that sprawled out in every direction among them.

It was not hard to imagine the dullness which had stifled such a town. But Chekhov's day was gone. I had not been there an hour before I realized that under the sleepy surface, Plavsk and the villages around it had come alive.

On the highway leaving town I met a sleigh carrying five people bound for the villages. They were city workers, three men and two women from the Hammer and Sickle Machinery Plant in Moscow.

What were they doing way down here in the provinces? Their plant was the patron of the Plavsk district, they explained. They were Communists, selected by their party branch to tour the villages for a month and explain the decisions of the Seventeenth Communist Party Congress, just ended.

Each of them was to be dropped off in a different village for a couple of days to hold meetings and discussions . . . to tell the collective farmers and individual peasants what their country was doing in industry, what was the political situation abroad . . . how many schools and hospitals had been built in the years just past, and what were the plans for new ones. They were to discuss all important reports made to the Congress.

Their factory provided each worker with food and paid him his regular wages.

The system of patronage, in which one institution aids another, is widespread in the Soviet Union. Hammer and Sickle Plant sent to the Plavsk district (free of charge) machines and mechanics, musical instruments for village orchestras and men to work on the local newspaper. In return, farms of Plavsk district sent gifts of potatoes and butter to the factory nursery.

Plavsk shock-workers journeyed to Moscow to go through their patron plant, an eye-opening experience for peasants whose only acquaintance with machinery as yet was the tractor used on their own fields. They returned to tell other villagers about the wonders of Soviet industry. City workers came down to the villages to become acquainted with peasant problems, and, as these I met were doing, to bring to the usually less-developed peasants, the benefit of their greater understanding.

Through this interchange of goods and experiences, workers and peasants began to feel that factories belonged to the farmers too, and agriculture concerned the workers—realization of inter-dependence vital to a collective society. And by broadening their horizons of

knowledge, all of them achieved a higher "cultural level".

The modern Russian word "culture" means not the forms of art, music, and literature with which we frequently associate it. To be cultured is to give proper attention to one's tractor, to paint one's house, to take a sick child to a doctor instead of to a witch woman, to use a handkerchief, and so on.

To be uncultured means that one beats one's wife or is superstitious or physically unclean or illiterate. Everything that chains the peasant to his dark past is lack of culture. Everything that advances him forward from it, is culture.

"Raising the cultural level" in the villages was next in importance only to raising grain. In other years the bulk of the peasants had hibernated during the long Russian winter, much like the Russian bear. Now the Political Section was prodding them, waking them up, pushing culture into every hut on the frozen steppe.

. . . . .

A versatile forty-year-old journalist named Feodorov had been loaned to Plavsk by the Hammer and Sickle Plant newspaper to do some of the prodding. His medium was the "cultural sled", whose function he thus explained:

"The mountain did not come to Mohamet so Mohamet came to the mountain. Many of our peasants would be slow to go after culture so we take it to them."

Feodorov's little sled carried books and pamphlets to sell in villages where there was no book-store; a barber shop to set up where there was no village barber, and a stereoptican projector (magic lantern) to use in every village.

"There was a time when the peasant guarded his beard with his life," said Feodorov. "When Peter the Great, trying to westernize Russia, decreed that Russians must be smooth-shaven, certain religious sects burned themselves alive in their huts rather than comply.

"Today the peasant knows it's uncultured to go around with a mop of beard all over his face. But these new-fangled Soviet safety razors are good for nothing. Mine is good old German steel." He ran his thumb lovingly over the edge of his long razor.

The "cultural sled's" main attraction was not the razor, however, but the stereoptican. Feodorov explained:

"I pulled into Vasilovka at two o'clock the other day. Two Komsomols who are my regular assistants in that village told me the news. Andrushin had gotten drunk and left the cow barn open. It took half the next day to round up the herd. The shrew Serafimova had caused a quarrel between her two neighbours with her loose tongue. Mikulin had beaten his wife the night before. And lots of other things. You know . . . the regular village gossip."

Between shaves the versatile apostle of culture drew cartoons illustrating these events on glass plates for his stereoptican. He labelled each with a satirical caption, put his screen up in the schoolhouse, and announced there was to be a show. At night everyone flocked in to see it.

"Mikulin, who had beaten his wife only the night before, and that in the privacy of his own hut, suddenly saw himself made ridiculous before the whole village. Everyone was laughing at him and yelling 'Shame! Shame!' He was dumbfounded. When he collected his wits and tried to sneak out, his neighbours yelled still louder. He almost burned up with embarrassment. He stopped dead in his tracks and swore he'd never beat his wife again."

"Do you think he won't?"

"Sure he won't! People don't like to have their sins trotted out in public. Everybody will be watching to see if he sticks to his word. The force of public opinion!—just expose the offender to it. That's all you need!"

CHAPTER XVI

HOW DOES YOUR GARDENER GROW?

FAR MORE SIGNIFICANT in educational value than the cultural sled were the many technical-political-cultural classes organized by the Political Section. One of the most promising was a year's course for gardeners, given not in the district centre but at Red Putilov Collective Farm nine miles from Plavsk.

Here lived Ushakov, an expert practical gardener, once head of Princess Gagarina's orchards and hot-houses. Any peasant would tell you that Ushakov could make more onions grow on an acre than most men could on six. Under his management, Red Putilov's garden had earned 80,000 rubles the previous year. The collective farmers at Red Putilov wore "valinki" instead of "lapti" (warm felt boots instead of birch-bark sandals); the village had a new granary, was building a dining-room and a dormitory.

Not a little of this prosperity was due to Ushakov. His fame was rapidly making the district garden-conscious. Twenty men and one woman had been selected by their collective farms to study gardening for a year under him and then return to take charge of their own farms' gardens and impart his skill to others.

I rode over to Red Putilov with Baranov, Natashin's assistant "in charge of mass education and cultural activities" who was to launch the class for gardeners. It was thirty below zero and the fields were blanketed with two feet of snow. But we sped along over the frozen surface of the Plava river in a fast cutter, leaving far behind the peasants who even this early in the season were hauling loads of manure to the fields in preparation for spreading when the snow melted.

It was an odd kind of schoolroom we entered. Heavy padded greatcoats hung on nails just inside the door, bits of ice melting from them into puddles on the floor. A huge whitewashed brick stove in the middle of the room reached the ceiling. Half a dozen long wooden benches and tables were the only furniture. In the corner of each heavily-frosted window, a small hinged pane was left slightly ajar to let in fresh air.

The walls had been plastered indiscriminately with political and educational posters, testimony to the zeal of the students if not their good taste. In the place of honour, the corner, devoted in old-fashioned peasant households to the ikons, they had put a picture of Kalinin, president of the USSR and a one-time peasant.

Baranov smiled at this and observed: "The corner's the place for saints. Maybe Kalinin doesn't feel at home there."

One of them got up in the midst of general laughter and moved the picture. The rest sat quietly like youngsters on their first day of school, while Baranov handed out the text-books.

The oldest of them pulled the steel-rimmed glasses down from his forehead and began eagerly to read, lips moving as he spelled out the syllables. He was thirty-nine, he told me later, had not been in a schoolroom for twenty-seven years. I saw other lips moving, and the stubby fingers of a young boy following each line across the page as he carefully deciphered the words.

Baranov asked each to read aloud so he would know how much time to spend on reading and writing. These students had been picked by their farms because they showed promise as gardeners, not because they were the most literate people in their village.

"We'll have mathematics in the morning," said Baranov, "because it's the hardest subject."

Young and old nodded approval of such a "well-thought-out plan."

"Then geography and Russian. In a few months you'll study physics and botany." Theory was to be taught by an agronomist from the Political Section.

"For the present you'll start at eight o'clock. Later on, when the collective farmers begin work at six, you'll start at six too."

"We're not lily-fingered," murmured the oldest student. "We can start at five."

"Besides study, you'll work with Ushakov in the garden every day . . . sometimes in the morning and sometimes in the afternoon. That's because there's different work to be done in the garden early in the day and at sundown. That's right, isn't it, Ushakov?"

"Right," murmured Ushakov.

Baranov concluded his outline of the course with this practical advice:

"You'll be going home for visits on the free day. See what's doing in the garden. Give the fellow who's taking your place, tips on what you've learned here. This year you ought to lay the foundation for changes you'll make next year. Then when you go home you can indeed enrich your farms with the knowledge Ushakov's given you."

He introduced Ushakov, a tall, slim man of sixty-five with a neatly-trimmed beard and well-worn but expensive fur cap. Ushakov, to whom fame meant nothing but a chance to tell somebody of the riches to be dug out of the soil, began with shining eyes to describe the new kinds of vegetables they would grow. The students eagerly drank in every word he said, looked around puzzled when he mentioned "asparagus". None had ever heard of such a vegetable. Ushakov excitedly leafed through a couple of books and showed them a picture of it.

Later, in his own clean hut with his wife bustling about preparing tea in the samovar, Ushakov told me about himself. His peasant father had somehow gotten him into a school for gardeners and when he finished he went to work for the Princess Gagarina.

"I liked to experiment." He pointed to a shelf of French and German botany books. "She had a passion for strange fruits and flowers. She gave me money to send abroad for seed. I became acquainted with the work of your Burbank."

He had corresponded for years with the late Michurin, the Soviet Burbank, and under the latter's instruction, planted in Central Russia fruit trees that had never before grown in such cold climates.

Baranov had told me on the way out how Ushakov had lived and worked secure behind the high brick wall of the Princess's garden, hardly aware of what went on outside it. When the revolution came he retired to his little house in the village and earned an ample living growing vegetables for the town trade.

He prospered and was branded a kulak. Only the intervention of an intelligent Communist saved him from being "de-kulaked" and driven out of the village in the fever of collectivization that swept the country in 1930. He had felt bitter then. But when he was asked to become gardener for Red Putilov, he accepted. A large garden was something he could not resist.

"Now our whole village is becoming well-to-do because of my garden," he told me proudly. "Last year I had five assistants and we planted thirty acres. This year I'll have twice as much land and all these lads from the other villages to help me.

"We'll build hot-houses bigger than anything Princess Gagarina ever had. We'll have seed to supply all the villages around, and a lot of young gardeners who'll know what to do with it. Our peasants will eat better than they ever did in their lives."

Before, he had grown fruits and vegetables for the pampered taste of a princess. Her garden could not expand beyond the wall of her estate. Now Ushakov dreamed of thirty gardens like the one he had, with villages growing prosperous on the proceeds.

"We'll enrich the whole countryside!" he said.

Three hundred men and women collective farmers had taken courses in Plavsk during the winter—collective farm chairmen, brigade leaders, veterinarians, managers of children's nurseries, herdsmen. By the first week in March they had completed their studying, and were going home to prepare for the sowing campaign. I talked with a few of them before they left.

Yakovlev was a smooth-shaven collective farm chairman, tall and lean, with deep ridges lining each cheek, obviously a man of intelligence and character. He had none of the humility one still sees in many of the older Russian peasants. He ran a three-thousand acre collective farm, growing some of the best oats, wheat and barley in the district. For three months he had been going to school at the Political Section.

"We used to lie on top of the oven and watch the cockroaches all winter," he said. "Now we study. It is good." He held out his big hands with the gnarled fingers. "I was semi-literate till this winter. Now I write almost as well as my son."

While he studied, Yakovlev (and all other Political Section students) was credited with work-days on the farm for which he would be paid after the harvest. His farm sent food to the community dining-room in Plavsk for his upkeep. It was money in the pocket of the collective if he could make it more efficient. Books and teachers were furnished by the Political Section.

Yakovlev slept in a dormitory, formerly the ballroom of Princess Gagarina's mansion, illumined by two lustrous crystal chandeliers. His wooden plank bed covered with dingy quilts from home was in drab contrast to the grace and loveliness of the room itself.

"A pity to waste those chandeliers. They ought to be in a museum," I told Natashin.

"Fifty peasants study under those chandeliers every night. Were they used to better advantage when fifty parasitic landlords danced under them? These peasants

are going to better the lives of 30,000 people," he bluntly replied.

Three classes of farm brigade leaders spent a month each in Plavsk under the same conditions as farm chairmen, learning how better to organize their field work.

One of them was Siderova, thirty-five-year-old woman brigade leader from the Dimitrov collective farm. With her straight nose, bright eyes and quick smile, Siderova was a beauty. The previous winter she had become a local heroine by roofing the village stable when the men refused to finish because of the cold. She had to dip her hands in icy water and painstakingly mould the clay and straw with her bare fingers so that there would be no cracks in the roof.

I asked her what prompted her to undertake so painful a task in the dead of winter.

"We women are used to washing clothes in the river. Our hands don't feel the cold so much. And besides, there had to be a roof over the horses, didn't there? One must pity the poor beasts. And where would we be without them? Our children would be left hungry."

I was reminded of what Political Director Natashin had told me the year before . . . that peasant women were often better fighters than the men because they had felt poverty more.

Siderova's farm was one of the poorest in the district. A quarry in the neighbourhood had for years drawn men away from the soil, leaving most of the field work to women. As individual peasants they had hungered and now as collective farmers they barely managed to struggle through the year, handicapped by the labour shortage and by a weak farm chairman unable to cope with the difficulties.

Recognizing Siderova's drive and organizing ability, Natashin and a few of the more advanced peasants had urged her to become candidate for farm president.

She threw up her hands with an embarrassed laugh whenever they mentioned it.

"What would they say to having a woman president? The men would laugh. They wouldn't do what I told them. Even some of the women wouldn't like it. They want to be bossed by men."

. . . . .

What Siderova said was true. But it was becoming less true. In Plavsk I attended a meeting of several hundred peasant women on International Women's Day and heard one after another tell what "we women must do to raise the productivity and cultural level in our villages".

Some were halting and shy, speaking with voices barely heard in the front row . . . . others in ringing tones challenged the rest to show that women could lead in the building of a socialist society. Many received sewing machines or dresses or sweaters or cloth as premiums for good work.

Best of all was stout "Auntie Katya" . . . a woman of sixty-five, who came forward from the middle of the auditorium in response to popular demand.

She was barely five feet high and more than half as wide, a fat little "auntie" whose waddling march down the centre aisle and laboured climb up to the stage was followed by warm, affectionate laughter and cries of "Good stuff, auntie!"

Aunt Katya took her stand behind the rostrum, mopped her broad face, barely visible over the top of the stand, and raised a chubby fist.

"Comrades, women! There is nothing we women cannot do if we set our minds to it. And we must not let anyone tell us to sit back and be silent.

"When I was first elected collective farm chairman there were plenty of tongues to discourage me. They said: 'Long hair, short sense.' They said I wanted to wear the pants in my family and pretty soon I would be making my old man bear the babies. Yes, and there were plenty of women who said these things too!

"These knockers, they pushed me down to the ground at first and thought I'd never get up. But I got up, and I kept on climbing and now I've climbed right up here on the platform to tell you about it!"

Whereupon, having proved that women could climb to places of importance and hold their own, illiterate Aunt Katya climbed down again and took her place among the masses of women.

CHAPTER XVII

"A COMMUNIST IS A COMMUNIST ONLY WHEN HE CARRIES OUT THE PARTY'S DECISIONS"

THE POLITICAL SECTION, field headquarters for the socialist remaking of 30,000 peasants, was quartered, paradoxically, in the bell-tower of the former priest's house, still decorated with a holy image over the door.

The structure formed part of the wall of an ancient cemetery whose crumbling gravestones and boarded-up old church were half obscured by a thick grove. The tall trees, bare and dark against the snow, were dotted with silent black crows looking like forgotten fruit left to freeze on the branches.

But in front of the bell-tower everything was alive. Peasants were getting out of their sleds to tie up at the hitching rail. Far out on the white steppe other sleds were coming in, tiny black dots on roads that radiated out from this nerve-centre to villages beyond the horizon.

At the door the peasants would pull back the hoods of their greatcoats, disclosing bearded faces under worn fur hats, and tight-waisted, full-skirted sheepskin coats, graceful and smelly. Few wore factory-made coats as yet.

The lower floor of the tower where the priest had lived was now the headquarters of the Machine Tractor Station. Only one agronomist was on duty there; the others were all out in the villages. The head mechanic was in the nearby garage supervising his peasant tractor drivers in engine repairs before the big "Tractor Review" to be held in a few days.

I climbed the narrow wooden stairs to the Political Section in the draughty loft. Natashin's five assistants were

all out on the job. Baranov was winding up the winter classes. The Komsomol Assistant and the Women's Organizer were in outlying villages getting Komsomols and women lined up for the spring sowing campaign. The GPU assistant was investigating an alleged misappropriation of funds on one of the farms. The editor of the *Politotdelets* newspaper had gone up to the Hammer and Sickle Machinery Plant in Moscow in search of a new assistant.

Anna Platonova, Natashin's little five-foot secretary in the big felt boots and faded grey coat, was leaning unceremoniously against his desk when I came in, telling the "Comrade Director" how she had handled matters in his absence.

She was a quick little person, mother of a two-year-old child, wife of the local schoolteacher and herself a Communist. She had attended a Communist Party school for a short time and wanted to study more. But the party, thus far, had been unable to get anyone to take her place and could not release her.

I settled myself on the broad window-ledge near Natashin's desk to see what went on in this crudely-furnished office and to think, many times in the course of the day, how 2,500 such men as he, stationed throughout the land, were helping to remake the destinies of millions of peasants.

. . . . .

Two peasants with frosted whiskers and hoary eyebrows clumped up the stairs, shifted their greatcoats back on their shoulders, and moved toward the desk. One of them stepped out as spokesman.

"It's about seed oats, Comrade Director," he said. "We've got 8½ tons with a germination of less than 80 per cent. To-day's paper says something about exchanging poor seed. How do we go about it?"

The Comrade Director congratulated them for coming on their own initiative. Many peasants, bound by age-old

fatalism and ignorance, would have waited to be told what to do. He sent his secretary downstairs for the agronomist's report to check the man's figures. It was the agronomist who was teaching the peasants that seed must be tested for fertility, crops rotated scientifically, chemical fertilizers used . . . all the many things that make the difference between scientific and "luck" farming.

"You're right, your oats are no good for seed," Natashin said after looking at the report. "Bring it to the government warehouse and they'll give you the same amount of certified seed with no charge. But your grain must have not more than 17 per cent moisture. Otherwise it ferments and then it's apt to smoulder and burn in the warehouse.

"Better start drying it today. Give a couple of sacks to each farmer to dry on his stove at home. And start today to build a drier. It should be finished in two days. In five days your grain should be dry and ready to be exchanged."

The men nodded and went out, pleased to have the matter settled by someone in authority. I remembered Larin's terse statement made a year earlier: "Our job at this stage is to decide, not to advise."

The all-important problem of seed selection on which the Communist Party's Central Committee had just issued a decree could not be left to the chance visits of collective farmers, however. Natashin decided to call on his Communist Party organizers to speed the exchange of ordinary grain for certified seed.

Party organizers were local Communists, some of them collective farmers but most of them working in schools, hospitals, grain collection trusts and the local factory. Their "community job" was to lead party members and other active farmers in the swift execution of instructions from the centre, either Moscow or Plavsk.

An organizer was attached to each farm, pledged by membership in the Communist Party to work every moment except the time spent on his regular job, to carry out instructions from the Political Section.

Platonova, the secretary, suddenly becoming stern, wound up the old-fashioned box telephone. Party decisions were law to her.

"Hello, Operator? Political Section calling. Clear the wires. We've got to locate all party organizers at once. It concerns the decision on seeds. Ready? Give me Petrov at the rock crushing plant."

The operator plugged in, located each organizer in turn somewhere on the steppe. Platonova, in a voice that brooked no refusal, delivered the message:

"You are summoned to a special conference on the Central Committee's decree on seeds. Come to the Political Section, March second, today, at six o'clock. That's all."

Meanwhile Natashin was proceeding with the next caller, a tall freckled Young Communist sent down a few months before from the Hammer and Sickle Plant to work on the Political Section newspaper. This three-month-old paper had a circulation of 4,000 and came out every other day. In the absence of the editor, Shingarev was responsible for the next issue.

He planned to criticize in biting headlines those collective farms which had failed to prepare seed for the sowing, now barely a month away. Natashin hid a smile from the youthful journalist:

"Don't waste time and paper tearing off their heads for past mistakes. Concentrate instead on conditions they can do something about. Batter away all you want at farms that aren't drying their seed properly. And get after the ones that lag in seed-exchange. There's plenty to do in the present. Forget about what's past."

The young journalist was crestfallen. He had spent three days riding across the steppe getting material for this exposé.

"Fell in love with a pretty peasant girl and his head's in a whirl," teased Platonova. Shingarev's ears burned as he went out.

A man detached himself from the group near the stove and came forward.

"I joined the collective farm last year after the sowing. I put my share of seed grain into the collective fund just like I was supposed to. I gave no seed potatoes because I hadn't planted potatoes and didn't have any. Now the farm management is holding out a bushel and a half of grain I earned and says I've got to pay it to make up for the potatoes. . . ."

It was a small problem but a big principle. Natashin got the farm chairman on the phone and verified the story.

"Hasn't the government made things easier for your farm this year because you have had a hard time?" he barked. "Then why must you squeeze the last bit of grain out of Yegorov? He's had his troubles. If the government can wait for tons of grain from you, then you can certainly wait for his few pounds of potatoes."

A short stocky peasant came in, pushed back his fur cap, wiped the frost from his long moustaches, and said dolefully that his farm's seed grain was wet and they had no wood to burn for drying it.

"Burn buckwheat hulls like everybody else," Natashin replied curtly. "And don't run to us with every little question when you know the answer yourself."

"Here's another thing, Comrade Director. We owe the government 4½ tons of oats. We offered the grain collection trust vetch instead. But they won't accept it."

This refusal was clearly a violation of a government decree specifying that farms unable to deliver the contracted amount in one grain might make good the deficit by additional deliveries of another grain or feed product. Apparently some small bureaucrat in the Grain Trust's local office was refusing to comply—owing perhaps to stupidity, perhaps to a desire to make a record by getting the maximum amount of the principal grain crops. He thought no peasant would question his authority.

Natashin angrily wound up the telephone.

"Tarasov!" he boomed. "Podkapaev from New Dawn Collective Farm is here. Why do you refuse vetch when

they haven't any oats? We've even got to give 'em their seed oats. You've read the order to accept substitute grains. Do it!" He slammed down the receiver without waiting for an answer.

Then, in spite of his earlier dictum that New Dawn should burn buckwheat hulls, he made arrangements by phone for them to be supplied with coal to dry the seed. This farm was having a difficult time and deserved extra help. Its members had gone to the fields in driving rain the previous summer when it was too wet to reap, and pulled the grain up by the roots in order to get some kind of a crop.

Before he left Podkapaev reached over and shook Natashin's hand, a gesture many of the peasants dispensed with. Power to countermand bureaucratic orders and to give special consideration to special cases such as this was what gave the Political Section its strength among the peasantry. Podkapaev's case was but one of many many thousands.

. . . . .

In the corner near the stove a few men had collected while Natashin was straightening out Podkapaev's business. One of them now stepped out belligerently. As he talked the others moved forward, nodding approval of what he said.

"Why are the individual farmers getting off without paying their debts?"

These men had pooled their resources to start the collective farm four years before. The early days were hard and the government, hard pressed itself, could make few concessions to them. Grain was collected when it was due. Resentment toward neighbours who would not join them turned occasionally to bitterness when they saw that these individual peasants (often fairly prosperous to begin with, else they would have joined the collective) continued to live better than they did.

"Now that we begin to live well, they want to join us.

The government says we have to accept 'em. Those who don't join whine that they're having a tough time, so the government helps them. We had to pay our grain debts when it was hard for us! Why should they get off so easy? Let them also struggle!"

The men behind pushed closer for an answer, their eyes on Natashin. I wondered what he would say.

He did not lecture them on the evils of selfishness and the beauty of Communist ideals and a socialist society. His answer was a practical one.

"You've seen that by working together you get along better than when you worked alone. When all will join the collective you'll live still better.

"The individual farmer of today is the collective farmer of tomorrow. When he joins the collective he'll bring his seed, his tools, his horse, his land with him. That will benefit you. A collective farm which has had a hard time this year isn't being forced to pay its debts. The government will wait till it grows stronger. The same goes for a man who in a year or two will be a member of the collective.

"What good would it do you if he had to sell his horse to pay his debts? It means he'd come into the collective without a horse. You'd be the losers in the end."

The belligerence subsided. The answer may have only partly satisfied them. But even politically undeveloped peasants could understand the good sense of helping a man who would soon be bringing his possessions to help them.

Straight thinking and straight talking had its effect. Many times that day I saw relief on men's faces, even when Natashin disagreed with them. Doubtless they did not like to be disagreed with more than anybody else. But the job of running large-scale farms was a big one for peasants who a few years before had had only a few acres and one plough to think about. They were glad to lean on somebody with experience.

There was a splash of sunset over the white steppe before we went out to eat. We hurried back to the six o'clock meeting of party organizers.

Sleighs and horses were tied up at the hitching rail. Upstairs in the office the men had already collected and were warming themselves over the big stove. They were quiet men. Most of them looked tired. Theirs was a double job every day in the week, their regular work and their party work.

Natashin, who spoke well from a platform and who in private conversation delighted in long talks on the merits of John Dos Passos, was primarily a man of action.

He read the decree on seeds. There were a few brief questions. Then he leaned over the desk and in the light of an oil lamp went over with each man in detail the specific tasks his farm must do to carry it out.

One objected that the collective farmers he had to deal with were incapable of doing anything in a hurry. Natashin, probably thinking that some of the men he himself had to work with were not all that Communists should be, briskly named over on his fingers the dependable men on the farm in question and showed how the necessary work could be done.

Through with the job, he put the papers away in his desk and stood up. Men buttoned on their heavy coats, preparing to ride out to the farms immediately.

"We won't waste time on general resolutions," said Natashin. "We all realize this is a matter of critical importance to the crop. What's more, a Communist is a member of the party only when he carries out its decisions. We hold each other to that obligation."

CHAPTER XVIII

ONE MONTH TILL SPRING SOWING

TWO DAYS AFTER mobilizing the party organizers for the seed exchange Natashin called a meeting of farm chairmen to learn how the work was progressing.

I hurried back to Plavsk from a nearby village, expecting to find fifty-five half-frozen farm chairmen thawing out after long rides across the snow.

Instead, I found Natashin sitting before the microphone in the little broadcasting room at the telephone exchange. He was interviewing the farm chairmen—but they were all sitting snugly at their telephones in villages scattered miles out over the frozen steppe.

It was a "wired-broadcast" using radio equipment and the telephone network. Each listener could talk with Plavsk and each could hear what all the others said.

Behind Natashin half a dozen men, wearing earphones, were listening intently: several members of the Plavsk Executive Committee who were also to broadcast; three agronomists; and a representative of the Commissariat of Agriculture who had arrived that day on an inspection tour from Moscow. Each was jotting down suggestions to give Natashin and names of lagging farms which would require a personal visit next day.

The ace reporter of the *Politotdelets* was also taking notes. Downstairs in the same building the printshop waited for his last-minute story. Next day all the collective farmers in the district would know who was prepared for the sowing, who was behind . . . and would be shamed or praised into better efforts.

The listeners' eagerness was contagious. I put on a pair of phones and started jotting notes myself.

Natashin signalled the radio-technician to get the next farm on his list.

"Hello—Padagerov? How are things going with the seed?"

"We've about a ton and a half of grain with seventy-six per cent germination. We'll finish drying on the sixth and on the seventh start bringing it to the elevator to be exchanged."

"Good, Padagerov. You've never yet failed to come through."

On the next farm things were not so good. The chairman said he didn't know what to do—just didn't have enough sleds to haul the grain to Plavsk for exchange. Natashin asked curtly if he had ever thought of borrowing sleds. Immediately he switched to another farm.

"Antopov, you heard what Iliushin says?"

"Yes, yes, Comrade Natashin." Telephones were still an innovation here. Many peasants talked rapidly, as though afraid the other fellow was going to get away.

"I know you're prepared," said Natashin. "You send a brigade over to Iliushin tomorrow with your own sleds and give him a hand. He'll never get ready for the sowing if we don't help him."

"I'll do that, Comrade Director."

Another farm chairman got a reprimand boomed over the wires in Natashin's big voice. "What do you mean, telling me your collective hasn't enough seed? What are you doing about it?

"If you've got to buy more seed and haven't the money you know you can borrow at the bank. Come to Plavsk first thing in the morning and see Krapov about it. Then come to me and we'll straighten things out."

And so on down the list till every man got approval or advice or prodding or the promise of immediate help. And each of them, at the same time, was educated by seeing what disposition was made of other problems than his

own. When a similar one arose on his own farm he would know what to do.

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The windows of the up-to-date broadcasting room looked out on the old Plavsk market-place. Here, every Thursday and Sunday, several hundred peasants flocked in to trade by methods centuries old, and beggars and fakirs still exhibited their miserable sores for alms.

The day following the radio meeting happened to be Sunday. Early in the morning there were strings of sleds coming in over the snow-buried steppe to Plavsk. Soon there were over a hundred of them, lined up in irregular rows, the horses munching hay on the frozen ground. Their masters, in heavy coats and fur hats, milled around and bargained over goods which they displayed in the carts or on the ground. . . . Grain and hay, squealing pigs, chickens, rabbits, mournful-looking cows that had walked miles to be felt and pushed and maybe sold. Calves bawled, chickens cackled, and owners yelled at prospective buyers.

The waste and inefficiency of the trading system was appalling. Able-bodied peasants drove for miles and then stood the whole day to sell a few bunches of carrots or two chickens . . . while consumers spent hours going from one peasant cart to the next, haggling over prices. This medieval trading was going on just beneath the windows of the modern broadcasting room which exemplified the efficient, collective production of the new order.

Peasants clustered around the little government trading stalls like bees around a hive, waiting to buy factory-made shoes and thread and cooking utensils. But many more were buying household goods direct from the producer . . . without benefit of intermediary or fixed price.

Everything that had ever been part of a household or raised on the land was for sale . . . butter, samovars, nails, eggs, old magazines, embroidered towels, old Singer sewing machines, a dish of pickles, a handful of dried herring.

When I admired the gaily-coloured homespun skirt on a lively peasant woman, she asked what I'd give for it. Satisfied by my offer she climbed up behind the old church wall for privacy, took off the skirt (she wore at least three) and handed it to me, as pleased with the bargain as I was.

Most transactions were accompanied by interminable haggling over prices, often by people who apparently had no intention of buying but bargained for the sport of it.

"How much?" a lanky peasant woman asked a man who carried a bulging samovar in his arms.

"Only sixty rubles."

"Sixty rubles!" She almost spat in his face. "It isn't worth twenty!"

"Twenty? Have you gone crazy? Look at this brass! Look at that lid! Do you think this is some kind of cheap-jack Soviet handiwork? Never! It's a pre-revolutionary samovar. They don't make them like this nowadays. Not a kopek less than fifty-seven."

"Give you twenty-five."

"Twenty-five?" (as though she were mad). "Look at it! All I ask is that you look at it. Give me fifty rubles."

"I might make it thirty. Look at the way the handle's tarnished."

"Thirty rubles for this Tula samovar? I'd sooner throw it in the river! Now if you were to say forty-five we might be able to . . . "

This was a woman of few words. She turned her back, started to walk away.

"Hey . . . wait a minute. Make it forty and we'll call it a deal. I'm tired of arguing about it, I swear I am. Perhaps you think Citizenness, that I have nothing better to do than stand here wasting my breath?"

"Thirty-five."

Being the stronger-willed of the two, she got it for thirty-five. The owner handed it over, grumbling: "It's a gift at that price—that's all I can say—a gift."

The same thing went on all over the market-place. I marvelled at the patience it took, and delighted in the "colour".

There were a few drunkards about, and a grey-haired grandmother who had had a drop of vodka and was singing some not quite respectable ditty and dancing with gusto unbecoming her age. The more virtuous women . . . and men . . . frowned disapprovingly, or told her bluntly to go home and tend to her cooking, but she was too merry to pay any heed.

Beggars varied with the seasons, flourishing in summer when the warm sun invited people to linger and observe the tricks by which they elicited pity and kopeks.

The Plavsk market was "worked" by a prize fakir, an artist in his line, who was able, at will, to fall victim to the most alarming seizures, a sort of combined epilepsy and St. Vitus's dance, horrible to see.

He would fling himself about on the dirty ground, twitching convulsively, perspiring, frothing at the mouth, tearing off his tattered filthy shirt. A ring of curious peasant men and women, keeping a respectful distance from the man's dirt and fits, argued loudly whether or not he was really "touched".

His wife, a thin creature, ragged and half-tipsy, circled about with an outstretched palm, wailing in the typical beseeching whine of the professional beggar:

"Kind Citizens. . . . Pity the poor afflicted. Give a few kopeks, for Christ's sake!"

The kind citizens hesitated. I noticed that men on the whole were more sceptical, though some women, too, showed disbelief and disgust.

"Ugh, the filthy creature. He's too lazy even to work!"

"Well, who knows, Citizeness?" put in a more gullible neighbour. "Maybe he's really sick and needs help?"

"Here's a woman with a heart instead of a stone," the fakir's wife began hopefully. "Give us a few kopeks, kind

believer. You who believe in God must be charitable to the unfortunate."

"Unfortunate nothing!" from a man who was looking on. "You think you can get by without working and the rest of us will feed you, that's all. The government ought to put you all in an institution. A plague upon your kind."

"A plague upon you!" shrilled the fakir's wife, spitting toward the opposition. And so it would go on.

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But this particular Sunday in early March it was too cold for such diversions. The peasants and townsfolk finished their trading early and trudged up the road toward the Machine Tractor Station. The Political Section was putting on a tractor parade—a "dress rehearsal for the spring sowing". Representatives of a neighbouring Political Section would be on hand to judge whether Plavsk tractors were ready to take the field.

Down in the frigid garage greasy young tractorists were building fires under their machines, watching anxiously while the flames slowly warmed the motors. Outside it was twenty-six degrees below zero.

I fell into step behind a wagon with a red banner stretched over the seat. "Collective Farm Pravda" it read. "For the Bolshevik Sowing of the Second Spring of the Second Five-Year Plan. . . . Ready!!" Behind it came a procession of ploughs pulled by strong teams, followed by sleds with women in gay kerchiefs, laughing and singing as they lined up opposite the Machine Tractor Station to watch the show.

Here was another instance of the ability of the Russians to make an occasion of what at home would be the most prosaic routine job. Flags and speeches and newspaper photographers and excited visitors from miles around.

Involuntarily I remembered how as a youngster in 1917 I had trotted gaily beside a few hundred drafted men marching to the station to entrain for an Army Camp.

Flags and speeches and newspaper photographers . . . and pride and loyalty . . . and tears which I was too young to see or understand. My one grief was that I had no big brother to go out and die for his country.

No tears here, but plenty of pride and loyalty toward a government which provided tractors for poor peasants. If governments must dramatize to stimulate loyalty and enthusiasm, I thought, let it be enthusiasm for domestic achievements like this—not foreign wars.

On the temporary platform in front of the bell tower, the head of the Cherinski Political Section was blowing on his hands as he talked with Natashin. With three of his men he had ridden forty miles across the steppe by sleigh during the night to judge the Plavsk tractors. Beside him was Cherinski District's crack mechanic, a six-foot illiterate peasant who could not read a tractor manual but who knew each little bolt and could diagnose a mysterious knock better than anyone within fifty miles.

There was a puff of smoke and a roar, and the first big Stalingrad tractor, flying a little red flag on the radiator cap, lurched forward and thundered past the stand. Behind it a Soviet-built Fordson churned in the snow, got a firm hold on the ground, and shot forward.

Peasants who had been dancing round an accordion, suddenly stopped. Like children waiting for the circus elephant, they pushed forward and watched eagerly while forty-four tractors, the pride of Plavsk, climbed on to the road and rumbled past the stand. Natashin's brow was tense. The Cherinski men looked on and said nothing. They followed the last machine solemnly into the garage for a detailed inspection.

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At four o'clock there was a gala dinner in the community dining-room, somewhat delayed owing to a little misunderstanding on the part of the manager. This was a sensitive soul who could not forget he had once served "gentlemen"

in a fashionable Moscow restaurant. Peasants and tractor drivers were scarcely worth bothering about.

Natashin came into the dining-room a few minutes before the dinner and discovered that the white linen tablecloths had been removed and seamy oilcloth left on the tables.

"What's this? Where are the white tablecloths?"

"Well . . . I didn't think . . ."

"You didn't think? Why didn't you? Is this Tsarist Russia where the linen is saved for generals and rich merchants? What kind of aristocrats are you waiting for?

"Let me tell you, Comrade, once and for all, the workers are the aristocrats now. Don't you save your best tablecloths for anybody else! Off with this oilcloth disgrace! Re-set the tables!" He walked out flushed with anger.

The dinner was served an hour later on gleaming white cloths. Afterwards, mechanics, peasants, and visitors filed into the Plavsk clubroom to hear the verdict of the tractor inspection.

The crack mechanic from Cherinski reported:

"Cylinder knocks evident in six tractors; carburettors set too rich on four; dirty plugs on several; nuts aren't standard sizes . . . that'll cause a lot of nuisance in repair jobs. . . . "

Finishing, he added, "If the Plavsk Comrades want me, I'll stay here a couple of days to help them out."

One of the Plavsk Comrades accepted, "We're grateful for the offer. This just proves socialist competition helps the competitors."

Natashin was the last to speak.

"This was to be a big celebration. But we're not ready to celebrate. Cherinski has shown us many defects. Do we resent it? No! Cherinski came over here, not like Gogol's 'Inspector-General' to frighten us, but at our invitation, to find shortcomings we had missed.

"We're going over to Cherinski in two weeks to try to find more things wrong with their tractors than they found

with ours. The more we find, the gladder we'll be. It'll mean we're helping more to get their agricultural army ready for the spring campaign.

"In the meantime we've got to go over all our tractors again. But we've got time. Last year we finished tractor repair on April fourth, the same day sowing started. This year we've got a whole month yet before sowing begins. Then we'll really celebrate by having a parade of first-class tractors march out and set to work on the steppe."

CHAPTER XIX

"TOGETHER ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE—BUT ONE MAN ALONE IS WEAK"

THE VILLAGE OF Kamino had a new heated collective farm stable. This was "news" in the Soviet countryside. Simeonova, the ruddy-cheeked girl reporter on the Plavsk *Politotdelets*, who was going out after the story, asked me to go along.

She borrowed a pair of felt boots for me and a huge, smelly, sheepskin greatcoat, known as a "tooloop", and big enough to wear over my own fur coat. The latter, she explained, might be all right for forty below zero on Moscow streets, but "would never do out on the bare steppe where bitter winds blow all the way from Siberia". Swaddled in sheepskin we were half lifted into the sleigh, Simeonova jerked the reins and we started off.

The cold made it hard to talk. I pulled the hood tight around my chin and silently watched the steppe spread out in front of us. There was nothing to be seen but snow to the horizon—not a tree, not a house, not a single moving thing; nothing to be heard but the crunching of snow under the horse's hoofs. Far off to the south the smoke of a train, etched for a moment on the pale sky, faded and blew away.

An hour of empty whiteness and silence and we saw Kamino village. The overhanging thatched roofs covered with a two-foot hood of snow seemed to weigh down the huts so that they looked more square than ever.

Kamino was a large village—300 families. The average in the Plavsk district had about a hundred families, the smallest only twenty-nine.

Our road passed the mill-pond where a stream had been dammed to turn a small grist mill. The big wooden water-wheel was half-buried in the frozen river. Half a dozen peasant carpenters, wearing coarse homespun aprons over their quilted clothes, were repairing the mill. Every few minutes one of them would shout roughly at the crowd of curious little boys who kept getting underfoot. But Russians are too fond of children to become really angry and the boys paid little attention to the gruff threats.

We drove to the cow stable to find the herdsman, Dobrov, a man with pale-blue eyes, wide cheekbones, uptilted nose and large mouth so common among Russian peasants. A pale stubble covered his chin, awaiting next Sunday's shave. He was of less than medium height and despite the heavy quilted coat and trousers, it was easy to see he was thin. The Russian peasant as a rule is not handsome and Dobrov's generation had come through war and civil war, famine and typhus.

The herdsman greeted us warmly, delighted as a child when he learned Simeonova intended to write about the stable in the local paper. But when he heard that I might write about the farm for readers in far-off America, he fairly beamed. To think that his village should be known in America!! He called the other stable workers, all women, to come and "make the Comrade from America welcome".

They took us first through the old stable where the cows lay in their cold, dark stalls. With zest they pointed out its defects in order that we might better appreciate the new one. Then, proud as a prosperous American farmer showing off his property, they ushered us into the new stable. Here, behind thick, warm, stone walls, the young calves of the collective lay in individual stalls, well lit by glass windows and warmed by a large iron stove at one end. The heat was carried the forty-foot length of the stable in a twelve-inch pipe crudely hung from the ceiling.

It would have been a crude heating arrangement in the eyes of a thrifty American farmer. But for peasants who had

formerly kept their cows and pigs in cold sheds attached to their own huts, this was indeed a "palace of a stable" as Dobrov proudly called it.

When Simeonova, whose paper was interested in ferreting out shortcomings as well as lauding achievements, asked if the farm management was efficient, all the women began to gabble at once.

"The book-keeper! Doesn't keep track of our workdays right! Gets 'em all mixed up! A fine book-keeper he is! He's a cobbler and that's all!" (To label anyone a "cobbler" means that he bungles every job he touches.)

Painstakingly Simeonova began questioning each one in turn, weeding out fact from fancy preparatory to a more thorough investigation by her paper. Relieved, the women turned their attention back to the stable.

"It's a job keeping wood in the stove," said a wrinkled woman of fifty. "But look at the way the little ones grow. This one has gained four pounds in the past week, that little white-nose over there has been filling out solid like a fresh turnip." She went to find out his weight from a card at the end of his stall.

"Of course," she added, "it isn't only the stable. We have feeding mixtures." She spoke carefully, as though a little afraid of such scientific-sounding terms.

A younger woman in red kerchief smiled shyly at me. "I suppose it seems strange to you to see us so proud. All the stables in America are heated, I suppose." She was surprised and pleased when I told her they were not.

"It won't be so long then before we 'overtake and surpass' America," she said, using the much popularized slogan.

Dobrov gave us the formula for feeding mixtures, and was sorely disappointed that I could tell him nothing about "American technique" in the feeding of calves. All his life he had been interested in livestock but until collectivization he had never had a good horse and sometimes not even a cow of his own. But when he showed skill and devotion in

caring for the collective's animals the farm had sent him to school for a few weeks to take a short course in animal husbandry.

Now he spent nearly every waking moment in the stables, and at night, by his own confession, lay on top of the big brick oven in his hut and pictured the day when Kamino would have enough money to buy a pedigree bull to improve its herd. His plain honest face lit up as he talked. Never in his past life had he been able to raise more than one calf at a time. Now, with half a hundred growing fat and strong under his direction, he felt as if his "soul was growing".

Dobrov took us to the granary where seed grain was being sorted and to the barn where men were repairing "our ploughs". The pride in "our" possessions apparent in Dobrov and his fellows was in marked contrast to the feeling of irresponsibility toward the collective's property that so often had characterized the early period of collectivization.

Dobrov believed thoroughly in collectivization. Not because of any abstract principles of social justice, or because he understood all the theoretical arguments advanced during the long fight within the Communist Party over agricultural policy.

He believed in it because it worked. He saw that he and others like him lived better when they merged their little patches of land and co-operated in getting large-scale farm equipment.

He set forth his views in speech pungent and colourful, salty with peasant proverbs. As we left the barn we passed two houses standing side by side. One had the usual rounded thatch roof covered with snow, the other was empty and had no roof. Dobrov stopped short and pointed:

"You ask if we're better off in the collective. Right there 's the answer. Both those roofs caught fire last summer and burned up. The first house belongs to a collective farmer. We put the roof on for him.

"The second belonged to an individual farmer. He was too busy tilling his fields and bringing in his crop to put on a new roof. There was no one to help him. So when fall came he had to leave the village because he had no house to live in.

"That's why one should join the collective," he concluded. "Together everything is possible. But one man alone is weak. It's like the mujiks used to say: 'One finger alone is no good in a fight, but five together make a fist.'"

Apparently others had seen the force of the same argument, for after the fire all the remaining "individual farmers" in the village had joined the collective.

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Dobrov led us to his own house, a squat, whitewashed clay hut hugging the snowy earth. It was the typical Russian peasant home of the region, with but one entrance, its small window decorated with wooden fret-work like a fringe of embroidery.

We entered, not the house proper, but the adjoining covered shed where Dobrov kept his cow. In a pile of junk in one corner lay the rickety wooden harrow he had used until collectivization brought tractors and better implements. Up under the eaves hung an old spinning wheel covered with cobwebs. Dobrov waved airily at it:

"The women don't use that any more. We buy cloth in the store."

From the cowshed opened the only door into the one room where Dobrov lived with his wife, his mother and his three children. Here was the peasant hut I had seen described in Tolstoy. One small room with a quarter of the space taken up by a big whitewashed brick stove. The family cooked directly over the coals in much the same way that American pioneers cooked over open fireplaces, except that this cooking compartment was shut in by a cast-iron door to retain the heat. Above the coals was an oven a foot high where the bread was baked.

The top of the stove, only a yard from the hut's low ceiling, was long and flat. Several members of the family slept on it on cold nights. Now collective farm grain was spread out on it to dry. Two feet above the floor, stretching from the stove to the end of the hut, was a wide wooden platform which served as a bed for that part of the family which did not sleep on the oven. A stack of quilts was folded up at the back. A red wooden chest in which clothes and towels and extra boots were kept, could be seen behind the soiled calico curtain shutting off one end of the platform.

There was one three-legged stool and a long narrow bench along the wall. At the end of the bench were a few newspapers and three or four books, among them a volume by Lenin.

In one corner was a crude table with wooden bowls and spoons. The other dark corner was lit up by the well-polished brass of an ikon round which were nailed smaller images. The whole ikon corner was framed by an embroidered homespun towel draped across the top and falling loosely at the sides.

Dobrov's old mother, sitting under the ikons, nodded her toothless head as we greeted her. She continued gazing absently into the past, a wasted figure in calico blouse and skirt of coarse wool. His wife emerged, plump and kerchiefed, from behind the curtain where she had been doing some mending, and asked us to sit down. Visitors from the city had never before come into her home and she was ill at ease. But Dobrov, who was more "worldly", talked easily, anxious to show us the difference between his past and his present.

"My children have warm felt boots. Before they wore bast shoes and wrapped their feet in rags all winter to try to keep them warm. My grandfather had one pair of boots which he and my father took turns wearing on Sunday. I wear boots every day. My wife does not spin all winter as my mother did. She buys cloth at the co-operative store.

"How did I live before the collective? My horse died and I could not plough. I went to work for a rich peasant.

When it came time for my sister to marry I had to sell my cow to give her a dowry. The wife bawled for a week. But what could I do? Our father was dead. I couldn't let my sister be an old maid.

"Did anybody help me buy another cow? No. But last spring after Comrade Stalin said every collective farmer must have his own cow, the collective here bought one for me. Now my children have milk and I am paying back for the cow as I can."

It was a story I had heard many times—one poor peasant throwing his seed on the earth and praying for a crop. Not enough rain, too much rain, the death of a horse —meant hunger. If he got a crop he was in no position to bargain for a good price. Often in debt to the kulak or grain-buyer, he had to sell at once to meet usurious interest rates or to buy food for his family. In winter he went off to the city to work at whatever he could get and earn enough to bring back a shawl for his wife and a few clothes for the children.

Now his few acres were merged in the great fields of the collective farm. If seed was not good the government advanced certified seed on credit. Government-owned tractors ploughed deeper than the ground had ever been ploughed before. Agronomists introduced new methods that increased crop yields. Dobrov shared in the farm's prosperity, getting more grain each year and he had, in addition, his individual property—house, garden, cow, pigs and chickens.

"What need have I for land and my own horse and the right to be hungry as I had before? You know what they used to say: 'Poverty is no sin.' But nowadays if anybody says that he adds: '. . . but it means you have to live like a pig!'"

Dobrov's story was a common one. I had heard it many times and was to hear it again in different parts of the country with only local modifications. But one thing surprised me and shocked Simeonova, the local reporter—

that here, in the seventeenth year of the revolution, in a village a hundred per cent collectivized, only an hour's ride from the district centre, girls could not marry without a dowry.

Other nearby villages had long since abandoned the custom. No one could explain why it had survived in an otherwise advanced village like Kamino. Apparently it had never been challenged. According to Simeonova, the Political Section of the Plavsk Machine Tractor Station was quite unaware that "such disgraceful cultural backwardness survived, right on its very doorstep".

Even the village Komsomol secretary, who should have shown a good example, had recently given a dowry when his sister married. Not only that but he had accepted two hundred rubles when he took a bride himself. He said that he alone could not change the custom.

Dobrov's wife shook her head regretfully. A lean neighbour, who had bustled in when she saw guests arriving, said with acerbity:

"And there are ten Communists in this village! And twenty-three Komsomols! When it comes to boasting about the heated stable and the ten-year school, they're right on hand. But when it comes to doing something so our daughters could marry without putting the family in debt, they're too busy. Humph!!—These 'cultured' people."

She spat in disgust, throwing the word "culture" back at these "leaders" of the village who were constantly reminding her that she must strive for enlightenment.

Dobrov's wife barked at her husband: "Why don't your Communists do something about it?"

Thus openly challenged before company, Dobrov, who had declared his intention of joining the Communist Party, said lamely:

"The dowry is indeed a chain on the peasant's neck. But what can you do? If there's no dowry the girl will sit home and wait for ever." He shrugged his shoulders philosophically, as the old Russian peasant had done for centuries. "After all, it's the way we 'dark' people have always done."

(Within a week Simeonova's paper opened a campaign against dowry-giving—"that wholly indefensible survival of the worst features of bourgeois marriage". Neighbouring Komsomols made speeches declaring that dowry-giving could spring only from a flagrant disregard of the fundamental Soviet principle of full equality for women. Delegations of peasant women came to Kamino to declare that their "work-hands" were all Soviet women should bring to their husbands. Dowry-giving was killed in Kamino.)

. . . . .

Dobrov agreed with the women in condemning dowry-giving. But on the subject of the church they were at opposite poles.

The church in Kamino had been closed when the villagers voted to use the building as a granary. The women of Dobrov's household had been among those opposed to the change.

His mother voiced a plaintive objection. "The priest never bothered anybody. The church gave us some place to go. Now there's nothing to do but sit at home."

"Never did any harm, huh?" grunted Dobrov. "So you've forgotten the time the old priest Vladimir came into our hut and demanded twenty kopeks to say a prayer for father's soul?" He turned to us. "We had only fifteen kopeks in the house so we gave him that and a little flour. He got angry. He threw the money into the fire and the flour on the floor, and walked out. After that we had to give him twenty-five kopeks to say a prayer.

"Do you remember the priest Pyotr?" Dobrov asked his mother. The old woman crossed herself hurriedly at the mention of that name. Her son turned to us.

"Pyotr had a church in Vasilovka down the river about twelve versts. At Easter time four years ago it was rumoured that something special was going to happen during the service. Some folks said there would be a miracle. People came twenty versts to see it. I took my whole family. Of

course I didn't really believe there was going to be anything like a miracle." Dobrov waved his hand in a deprecatory gesture.

"Pyotr's church had never been so full. 'Christ is risen' he chanted. 'In truth, He is risen,' the people replied after him. Pyotr swung the censer back and forth. Women and men sobbed—candles flickered—friends kissed each other.

"When the service ended people hung around a little instead of going right out. Everyone was looking at each other, wondering what had become of the miracle. Suddenly Father Pyotr yelled 'Stop!'

"'Stop!' he shouted. 'I've got something to tell you!' Everybody stood still and looked at him. 'For thirty years I have fooled you with all this incense and chanting and praying," he said. 'I didn't know! I believed! I was fooled myself and I helped mislead you.'

"'You gave me money to pray for your dear ones who had died. But all my prayers can't help them. You must help yourselves here on earth!'

"Tears were running down his cheeks and there was such suffering in his face as I've never seen on a man. He tore off his beautiful robes—threw the gold crown from his head so it rolled along the floor. Nobody touched it. People were afraid to move.

"'For thirty years I have fooled you!' he cried. 'From today I will live and work as an honest man.'"

Dobrov finished, obviously moved by the story he had told. He had lost his religion since then—a candidate to the Communist Party could not be religious. But he could still re-live the sensation of the memorable day when a holy father stood before a believing flock and called their religion a lie and a sham. The whole region had been shaken by the event, a miracle indeed to the believing peasants.

When Dobrov finished, Simeonova nodded confirmation. "The story's true. I am from these parts myself. I taught school in Kaluga with one of Pyotr's daughters. Pyotr himself now works as a labourer in a factory in Kaluga. Once

when I went with my friend to see him he told me that life was not so easy as it had been—he never did manual work before—but he said he now felt like an honest man.

"Pyotr had more education than most village priests," she explained. "For years before this event he had been reading Marx. At first he was trying to prove to himself there was nothing in Marxism, later he wanted to reconcile it with his religion. It was a terrific struggle. His daughter told me that night after night he used to walk in the fields, coming in at dawn with anguished face. When I met him he was peaceful, but his hair was snow white."

The peasant women were silent. Pyotr's story was generally known. They had long since ceased to marvel at it, accepting it as one more of the mysteries of religion which they could not hope to understand. The more devout whispered to each other that Pyotr was possessed of a devil on that memorable Easter Sunday.

"But still we should have a church," persisted Dobrov's wife. "Now we have to ride five miles to the nearest church to christen the new-born babies. It's very bad in winter."

Having just ridden across the steppe myself, I agreed that it must be too cold for infants. "But why must they be christened in Church?" I asked.

She looked at me in amazement. "Why, unless they are christened how will we know what to call them? Without names they will be like the calves or the little pigs."

When I told her that thousands of babies each year in America were given names without being taken to church, she was incredulous.

"We are dark people," Dobrov apologized for her. "We know little about your America."

But he wanted me to understand that the Russian peasant was not so dark as he once had been. His method of proving it was an odd one. He jerked open a door under the stove and out jumped a little white pig. The piglet scampered about on his short legs, came to his master to get his ears

scratched, and obediently retired into his cell when Dobrov nudged it with his boot.

"That was a sickly little runt nobody wanted to take care of. But our country needs livestock so I took him home to raise by hand. He needs to be warm so I keep him inside. But you will notice there is no odour of pig in the house."

Honest Dobrov saw nothing amiss in keeping a pig under his stove. On the contrary, he was proud of the cleanliness maintained while doing it.

"If you live an uncultured life your pig or cow may be outside in the shed but all the same your house will smell. But if you are clean and look after your pig in a cultured way, he can be right in the room with you and you won't know it."

From my point of view when I had climbed up to look at the top of the stove, Dobrov's house was none too clean. Cockroaches and bed bugs scuttled along the walls and ceiling, apparently undisturbed by the disinfection campaign being waged in the village. The curtain at the edge of the bed looked as though it had not been washed for years.

The hut's only window had been sealed shut with rags and pitch at the first approach of winter. And all the windows in this latitude are double, that is, have two sashes with six inches of dead air space between for insulation. As a result the air was stale from the beginning of the long Russian winter until its end.

"But I'm going to have a *fortochka*," said Dobrov, catching my eye on the window. A *fortochka* is one small pane so hinged that it can be opened in winter when the window proper is sealed shut. "A *fortochka* is a thing of small construction but for a cultural life it is essential." He used the slogan brought out by the newspaper *Politotdelets* after the recent "cultural conference" in Plavsk.

To bring a Russian peasant to the point where he feels a need for fresh air in winter is a tremendous achievement.

Only those who knew the abysmal ignorance of the peasant before the revolution in the Russian village can fully appreciate this change. To foreign eyes it may not seem a particularly significant advance. To Simeonova, born in just such a village as this one, it marked "the awakening from the darkness of the Middle Ages".

CHAPTER XX

KULAK POLITICS IN THE VILLAGE SOVIET

I RETURNED TO PLAVSK the following summer and spent three weeks with Natashin and his family. While there I saw at first-hand what heretofore I had only read about—the exposing of a kulak.

. . . . .

At the far end of Siniavino village the open-air meeting place was filling up. Peasants, fresh from the first day's reaping of the rye, were quietly finding places on rough log benches in front of the chairman's table. Some came with scythes over their shoulders, many with the pungent odour of perspiration, that blended with the fresh smell of the river and the summer evening.

By the time the members of the District Executive Committee had arrived, the benches were filled. A knot of women murmured under their breaths at the edge of the crowd, speculating in the blunt uninhibited fashion of the Russian peasant as to the reason for the Executive Committee's meeting in their village.

"Think of it! They come all the way out on horse-back after sun-down. Don't they have enough chairs in their Plavsk offices?"

"Maybe they decided to unglue themselves from the chairs and take a look at what's going on here in Siniavino. It's about time!"

"I hear they want to see that new well the Village Soviet has dug right at the river's edge so the first flood will wash mud into it."

"They say somebody wrote a letter and complained the Village Soviet didn't assign him enough land."

"Naw . . . our mujiks haven't got enough guts to do anything like that."

"What do you suppose the militia-men are for?"

Two uniformed militia-men had tied their horses to a post and now stood quietly in the background. Their shiny leather holsters glistened in the light of a golden harvest moon.

Abolnikov, chairman of the District Executive Committee, pounded with his gavel and called for the regular order of business. The district doctor reported achievements and shortcomings in local public health administration. A nurse spoke about her inspection of collective farm nurseries. The peasants only half listened. Was this important enough to require a special meeting in the midst of harvesting?

They straightened up, however, when the third item on the agenda was announced . . . the necessity of considering ". . . the kulak politics of the Siniavino Village Soviet, in the person of Pukaltsev, its president, who has set his own interests higher than those of the party or the government."

Abolnikov read the charges:

"Certain individual farmers, friends of Pukaltsev, have escaped paying the farm tax. . . . The Village Soviet land commission assigns the worst land to the collective farm; members of the commission take extra land for themselves and leave some of the poorest individual peasants without any. . . ."

Suddenly he interpolated:

"Was the collective offered this extra land?"

Pukaltsev rose, his moustached face showing uneasiness, his round black eyes fixed on space in front of him.

"No."

"Why not?"

"They wouldn't have taken it. It was in small strips."

"You lie!" shouted the young collective farm chairman, jumping up. "We'd have taken it if we'd had the chance!"

Silent hatred on the faces of many and an occasional

brief and bitter denunciation breaking into the questioning, showed how general was the resentment and ill-will in Siniavino.

The trouble had been brewing for a long time. By July, 1934, when 78 per cent of the peasants in the rest of the district were collective farmers, in Siniavino only 24 per cent had joined the collective. One important reason for this backwardness, I was told, was that the village was only three miles from Plavsk. Proximity to the Plavsk market for generations had made Siniavino peasants more interested in speculating and trade than in tilling the soil.

This condition, aggravating the usual difficulties of collectivization, made the Siniavino collective farm one of the weakest in Plavsk district. Moreover, Siniavino was one of the villages under the jurisdiction of the District Executive Committee. This body, staffed by "second-string" men, could not give such concrete leadership as that by which the Plavsk Political Section had rid its villages of kulaks and bickering.

Siniavino collective farmers quarrelled with each other; they quarrelled, too, with their individual farmer neighbours because the latter would not join them and help build a strong collective. Individual peasants bickered among themselves. Nearly everyone in the village fared badly.

The exception was the clever Pukaltsev and a few of his friends. A man of energy and shrewdness, he had joined the collective and gotten himself elected chairman of the Village Soviet. In that position he had connived with certain of his individual peasant cronies for their mutual profit. He saw to it that they were assigned the village's best land, escaped paying their taxes, and benefited in various other ways, for which they in turn rewarded him.

Defrauding the government of taxes would have been a crime in any country. But the moral and social crime of cheating poor individual and collective farmers was, in the Soviet village of 1934, an even more serious transgression.

Eventually, a "peasant-correspondent" complained to the Plavsk paper, and the District Executive Committee learned, very tardily, what was going on right under its nose. To avoid warning the culprits, the correspondent's letter was not published. After a quiet investigation, the District Executive Committee decided to spring the charges suddenly at a village meeting and to question the accused in the presence of his victims.

This was a strategic move. It not only brought out the facts but showed all, both individual and collective farmers, how a clever kulak had cheated them and set the whole village at odds.

The lines of the class struggle here were not readily apparent; it was not, at first sight, a clear case of black against white, kulaks against poor peasants. Instead, the conflict was confused, with enmities cutting across class lines. The peasants, dispirited and unsuccessful, not understanding the cause of their troubles, quarrelled indiscriminately with those around them. Poor collective farmers, who had fared badly, were resentful toward poor individual peasants who refused to work with them. Individual farmers were "sore" at other individual farmers, and members of the collective against fellow members.

Gradually, however, the questioning clarified the situation, animosities crystallized, poor peasants, individual and collective farmer alike, recognized Pukaltsev as the common enemy.

"Who wants to speak?" asked Abolnikov.

"I do." A woman of thirty stood up, pulling a faded grey jacket together over her breast. "My land was in different sections, the best on the brow of the hill over there." She pointed to where a yellow half-moon was climbing up through the evening mist. She moved slowly forward as she spoke, her bare feet half-buried in the mud of last night's rain, a handsome, dark-skinned woman with passion in her gestures and her voice.

"I saved the best land for the rye—but when my husband

went up to plough he found it already planted. We didn't know who'd done it till yesterday, when we saw Trafimov reaping it."

Trafimov, standing on the edge of the crowd, shifted his weight uneasily and involuntarily cast a quick glance at his friend Pukaltsev.

"When I complained to Pukaltsev about my land being taken," she raced on, "he told me not to come to him. Said I hadn't planted my best land and it was my own fault if somebody else got it.

"He knows my husband and I have seven mouths to feed," she finished, and sat down abruptly.

A second woman told how Pukaltsev had assigned her a piece of land belonging to another Village Soviet, and refused to give her any other when she remonstrated.

"There's plenty of land," spoke up Trafimov glibly. "They're just dogs in the manger."

"You're not saying one true word!" shrieked a woman near me. A dozen taut, shrill voices joined hers.

A woman collective farmer spoke up.

"I've got nine children and a tenth in the Red Army. I'm sixty-five years old, but I work every day in the collective. When I asked Pukaltsev for land for my own garden he wouldn't give it to me. Why is that?"

She had heard that families of Red Army men were to be given special consideration. Yet in her own village she was treated with disrespect.

As the questioning gathered speed, moving towards a climax, the crowd grew tense with excitement. A wagon came rattling around a turn in the road, and fifty people jumped to their feet, electrified by the sudden sound. A trickle of nervous laughter as they sat down relieved the atmosphere for a moment.

The excited young farm chairman, just beginning to see how they had been duped, broke in bitterly:

"Pukaltsev joined the collective farm just so we wouldn't see what he was up to. He had his son Efim stay out, and

got him assigned more than his share of the best land. He probably got him off easy on the taxes, too." The words tumbled out of his mouth.

"He was a good farmer. And we, like little children, thought he was with us. How we've been taken in! It just shows—once a kulak always a kulak! I could tear the heart out of him, the old devil!" He clenched his fist and moved toward Pukaltsev.

Abolnikiv pounded on the table. "No fighting, Comrades! We're here to consider the question in a cultured manner. . . . Anybody else want to speak?

More angry complaints . . . till the chill of night came up from the river's edge and children called to their mothers to come home.

"Anybody else?"

Natashin, head of the Plavsk Political Section, the leading Communist in the district, rose to sum up the case. He had no official connection with the investigation. But this was an open meeting and anyone could speak.

A forceful speaker, he was brief and to the point, setting forth Soviet agricultural policy and its application in Siniavino in terms the most backward could understand.

"Comrades, this has been a well-attended and a noisy meeting. You are only now experiencing the growing pains that other villages knew three and four years ago and have by now forgotten.

"Only one woman told us fully tonight how she was cheated out of her land. So at one time, all of Russia was cheated out of its land by a small few. But you individual peasants will find it easier to fight now because the collective and the Soviet government are behind you. . . .

"The Soviet power is not against the individual farmers who work honestly, who fulfil their obligations and who work harmoniously with the collective farm. But . . . it *is* against the individual farmer who gets power by stealing land and by speculating, who lives not by honest work but by fooling the rest of you. . .

"The Soviet power is for the collective farm because, working the land and owning the tools together, you can work better and live better. If in Siniavino you collective farmers live worse than some of the individual farmers, and for that reason only a few of you join the collective, that is because a handful of kulaks are living at your expense. . . .

"More people will speak than opened their mouths tonight. But when this fight is finished, the kulak will be out and the power in Siniavino will belong to the working peasants."

Murmurs of approval from the crowd were cut short by Abolnikov's gavel. The District Executive Committee had held a whispered conference while Natashin spoke, and now announced its decision.

Pukaltsev was from that moment relieved of his post. He would be turned over to the prosecutor for trial. With him would be tried his associates, the members of the village land commission.

With that the meeting ended. Knots of peasants, talking quietly, relaxed after the stormy session, drifted home to their dark huts. In Siniavino, three years behind its neighbours, the power of the kulak was broken.

PART III

CITIZENS—ADMIRABLE AND OTHERWISE

CHAPTER XXI

COOKS MUST LEARN TO RULE THE STATE

Lenin: ". . . We must free women from the drudgery of the kitchen. . . . Every cook, every common labourer, should be drawn into the conduct of the government. . . ."

SHE WAS STANDING next to me in a doorway on Gorki Street, waiting for the Red Army tanks to start their deafening charge towards the Red Square. Up on the Square delegates to the seventeenth Congress of the Communist Party were coming out into the soft snow to see proof of the War Commissar's statement that the Soviet Union was ready to defend every inch of its territory.

A worker in heavy boots who had been talking to her laughed exultantly when the first tank warmed up for a test. When its heavy rumble died away he turned and said:

"Well, what would your farmers think of that?"

"Oh, if they could only see this they would be ready to give their very souls for our country." Her voice was subdued with awe.

I moved closer. She was of more than average height, solidly built as peasant women are. Her thumbs stuck out of her ragged mittens, her big felt boots were so badly worn that the soles sopped up the wet snow like sponge.

"We see pictures of these tanks in the papers. But it's hard to believe there are such things." She saw I was listening and said "hello". We started to talk and she told me where she was from and what she was doing in Moscow.

"I'm Pankratova, manager of a state hog farm in Ozeri, about two hundred miles from here. I came down to get feed for our hogs. The fellow who had the job last year

didn't lay in a supply when he should have. I've been running all over for it—this is my third trip to Moscow.

"But this time I didn't let any chair-warmers stop me. I went right to the Commissar of Supplies and I said: 'Unless we get feed our hogs will die. The country needs livestock. How can we have livestock if we can't get feed?' So he gave me an 'order'."

Triumphantly she pulled the official paper out of her bulging purse. It was an achievement to get feed in that winter of shortage. But she was not boasting. Her broad red face framed in the grey shawl was honest and open and straightforward. In the same matter-of-fact tone she told me about the shoes she was going to buy.

Pankratova was a textile worker transferred temporarily to the hog farm. Her mother before her had worked in Shcherbakov's mill in Ozeri and she went into the mill at the age of ten. After the Soviets took it over she became a shock worker, leader of the plant's best brigade. She reduced the waste in her shop to below the norm for textile plants. Young workers said she was a better teacher than men sent from Moscow with diplomas in their pockets.

Her after-work hours she spent doing "social work" (unpaid work for the community). She used to scour the town with her brigade in search of chairs for the school and blankets for the children's nursery, almost as hard to get in the early period of industrialization as feed for the hogs. At night she campaigned for the State Internal Loan.

"What made you do it?" I asked. "You must have been tired after a day in the mill."

"Well," staunchly, "no foreign country is going to lend us money to build our factories with. We've got to raise it ourselves if we're going to have factories and plenty of everything for everybody.

"It's like my father says," she continued. "He's ninety now and he worked for Shcherbakov's mill since he was seven. Now he's blind and has an invalid's pension and

lives with me. He says: 'Every little brick that goes into a building in Ozeri is yours. All your work means you're building something for yourselves, not for Shcherbakov.'

"He's right. In the old days we worked hard and the boss got rich. Now when I work hard getting feed for the hogs I know we'll all live better next year."

I grew tired of standing and drew her away to a bench in a nearby hallway. She admitted with some confusion that she had slept all night on that same bench.

"You know how hard it is to find a room in Moscow. Usually when I come down I sleep in the dormitory of the Textile Trust. But they're having an All-Union Musical Contest of textile workers and the beds were all taken."

We sat down.

"I used to pray and cross myself in the old days when things were bad. Of course that didn't help. But now instead of praying we help ourselves. Like this: My little boy always used to have sore throat. I couldn't afford an operation. But our town Soviet put up a hospital and he had his tonsils taken out."

When she first began staying away from home to do social work her husband was furious. "The Communists are a godless lot. If you follow them you'll end in Hell." He beat her when she was elected to the town Soviet in 1931.

"He was a dark ignorant man," Pankratova explained. "He drank all his life. Two years ago, while he was drunk, he hanged himself. If he hadn't died I'd have left him. A Soviet woman isn't made to be beaten. Since then I am happier. My children are growing up and I can spend nearly all my time working for the Soviet country."

Seeking to draw her out I asked her again what she did for the "Soviet country".

"Anything they ask me to do, I do." By "they" she meant the Communist Party in Ozeri.

"But I didn't want to manage the hog farm. I told them they should choose a more literate person. But they said

there'd been literate people on the job and they'd made a mess of it. They said when I started a job I finished it," she explained simply.

"Oh, I can read," to reassure me, "I can read very fast. But it's hard to figure sums. Take the zero, for instance. It's nothing, but see how important it is! If you put it in the wrong place the whole thing has to be done over again. I lie awake nights thinking: 'Why can't I do it better?' But it comes hard. I'm forty-two."

I could see it hurt her to confess that she, who could work so well on a job, could not do a problem on paper.

We went outside again to see if the parade had begun. She pointed to the Moscow Soviet building across the street, gleaming rosy and wet under the soft snowfall.

"Whoever would've thought that I, a poor, unlettered working woman, would walk into that building? That's where the governor lived. Before the revolution I would never have dared stop in front of it. Now I've been coming to Moscow for three years to meetings of the Moscow Province Executive Committee. I eat at the same table with the president in that building. And a plain working woman from our factory—just like me—is up in the Kremlin now attending the Communist Party Congress," she added triumphantly.

I asked if she were a Communist.

"No. To be a party member one must study a lot about Marx and Lenin. And I can't learn from books!

"But I can work. I feel everything like a party member." She put her hands on her breast and leaned forward, speaking with emotion.

"I feel everything! I understand everything our country needs. I work with my whole soul!" Pankratova's plain face lit up, becoming almost beautiful.

There was a deafening rumble on the pavement and she turned away from me. All along Gorki Street Red Army men were climbing into their tanks. Two by two the olive

green machines began their speedy march up to the Red Square.

"What's that?" She pointed to one type of gun after another. "What are those?" as the giant projectors glided by, all set at the same angle, ready to light up the heavens. Her eyes were glued to the parade that showed "our achievements" in military technique.

The last rumble died away, cordons of militia-men broke up and the crowd began to scatter. She turned a beaming face to me.

"Now I can go home and tell my comrades and my children what I saw." She was about to start down the street when she remembered that I might write her story for my newspaper.

"You'll write it well, won't you?" she asked earnestly, "so abroad they'll understand?

"Tell them," she said, gripping my hand, "tell them we are going from the dark into the light."

. . . . .

Sitting next to me at a Moscow Theatre School production of "The Tsar's Bride", was a slant-eyed young woman with the broad cheek-bones and brownish-yellow skin of one of the Soviet Union's national minorities.

Beyond her somewhat flat profile I could see French and Danish and British actresses, perfumed and stylishly dressed, who had come to the USSR for the first annual Moscow Theatre Festival. I wondered how this plain girl with the coarse black hair, wearing the cheap serge suit, had strayed into such an audience. So, having acquired Russian directness in such matters, when the intermission came I asked her.

"I've come from Yakutia," she replied shyly, in careful Russian.

"Yakutia? Up near the polar circle?"

"Yes."

By no conventional American standards would that Oc

broad face have been considered pretty. But white teeth brightened her dark countenance, the light glanced off the high cheek-bones and the bridge of her short broad nose. She was striking, and in her own fashion, very good-looking.

I had grown used to seeing every type of person on Moscow's streets. But not at special theatre performances.

"How do you come to be here—in this auditorium?"

"I've come to study in the school. Twenty of us arrived yesterday. Today they told us we could attend the production or go on a sight-seeing tour. My friends wanted to look at the city. But I love the theatre!"

We had strolled out into the corridor and stopped near a window. I saw her eyes, entranced like those of a little boy watching the journey of his first toy train, follow a street car as it turned a corner below us.

She and her companions had travelled four months to get to Moscow. From the north-east corner of Siberia they had come up the tortuous length of the Lena River as far as boats could go. The boats were not big enough to hold all of them at once, so they separated. Every week or two they would meet in some village and wait for the whole party to catch up.

From the headwaters of the Lena they penetrated the taiga on foot and on horseback to Irkutsk, the nearest point on the railroad, 2,000 miles from their native town. The train brought them to Moscow.

"I never saw a train before," her dark face flushed with self-consciousness. "None of us had. And such buildings as there are in Irkutsk! Wonderful! And Moscow is even more beautiful," she added quickly. "I'd seen pictures of trains and large houses. But you have to see with your own eyes to understand!"

Well might a Yakutian girl wonder at Moscow. Moscow holds ten times as many people as all Yakutia, though that republic is almost equal in size to European Russia. Yakutia's average village is made up of two or three

families; its capital, Yakutsk, had then only 10,000 inhabitants. There was not one mile of railroad on all its vast territory, though it held some of the richest gold mines in the country. As late as 1926[1] in Yakutia only fifty people out of every thousand had attended a school of any kind, and there were only ten libraries for all its 300,000 inhabitants.

The young actress I talked to was the daughter of a nomad reindeer herdsman who had hired her out at the age of seven as a nursemaid to a family in the town of Yakutsk. She worked as a servant till 1929 when she got a job as charwoman in the Komsomol District headquarters. Here, at the age of twenty-seven, she learned to read and write. She was encouraged to study further, to be active in trade union and community activities. Timidly she joined a chorus group.

"I loved to hear people sing." For weeks she was too shy to open her own mouth and sing with them. When she did it was discovered she had a beautiful clear soprano voice. She sang the leading role in the first opera produced in Yakutia, revealing in rehearsals a talent for acting as well. From that time the theatre was her passion.

"Every evening after work I went to classes to study literature or rehearse for a play. I loved it!" She was overcoming her timidity. "Yakutsk is not like Moscow with a theatre in every street. We had only one. But everyone wanted to see our plays. The peasants came in from nearby villages. But our people are scattered—nomads—many live way out on the tundra with their reindeer. Even the schools must travel with the herds.

"Now there are big boarding schools in the villages and some of the children are left there to study. But some of the parents are still afraid to leave them. We are a backward people." Everywhere in the Soviet Union one hears this phrase from a nation made conscious that it is shameful and unnecessary to be ignorant.

[1] The census of 1937 had not been tabulated at the time of writing.

"But we've put up hospitals out on the tundra and club-houses where the Yakutians come to read and study and listen to the radio. Why should we not also have theatres for the herdsmen?"

The central government of the Yakutian Republic also thought: "Why should we not have theatres?" So it sent these twenty natives to Moscow to study for three years at government expense. Singing, acting, dancing, directing—every phase of the theatrical art was to be mastered by them. Then they were to return to their native city and form a Yakutian National Theatre whose offshoots would dot the tundra for thousands of miles around.

"We will have a theatre school of our own to train people in our own language to produce our own plays." Again the quick, shy, happy smile flitted over her face.

People were filing in for the next act and we followed them. The Yakutian girl walked demurely, awed by the rustle of silk. As the curtain rose and the light from the stage was diffused in the theatre, I could see her leaning forward, hands clasped in her lap, absorbing with passionate intensity every movement of the fair young soprano on the stage, no doubt visualizing herself singing "The Tsar's Bride" to Yakutians beyond the polar circle.

Before I saw her I had been feeling conspicuous in my shabby suit, a little envious of the well-cared-for richly attired European women all around me. But now thought of clothes seemed trivial beside the realization that in this vast country were millions like this Yakut girl.

For centuries their genius and talent had lain buried in the frozen swamp. Now the warmth of the Soviet sun was penetrating to it, causing that genius to stir. The dark rich bog of old Russia was beginning to bloom.

. . . . .

She had the broad cheek-bones and straight colourless hair of millions of her sisters, this peasant woman from the Central Black Earth Province. There was nothing of

humour about her, only intense earnestness in her quiet voice.

I met Yegorova outside Andreyev Hall in one of the Kremlin palaces. The blue skirt and jacket she wore were as little designed for show as was her plain face with the wrinkles around the eyes and the chaste white streak on the upper part of her forehead where the kerchief usually covered it for protection from the weather. Her only ornament was the red enamel badge that proclaimed her a delegate to the sessions of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union, comparable to our United States Congress.

It was the lunch-hour intermission and time was limited but she was glad to talk to a representative of the English newspaper. The sense of importance and of the dignity of office which sometimes weighs heavily upon Congressmen in America were "refinements" of feeling unknown to a peasant woman.

Before we found seats she was telling me about the Lenin Commune in the Central Black Earth Province, *her* commune.

It was founded in 1922 by fifty-two Russian-Americans who returned to their homeland, bringing machinery and idealism with them. They wanted to enlist the peasants in their communal venture but they had a hard time at first. The rich peasants burned their barns and kept the poor ones from joining by telling them if they did so they were selling themselves to the devil.

"Our Russian peasant is dark," she added apologetically to explain to me, a foreigner, why the peasants would believe such a story.

"How long have you belonged to the commune?"

"Since 1925. But I began working on that land when I was twelve. My father had half an acre and my brother the same. But my mother and sisters and I didn't have any because we were women. My father had no horse so he could not till the soil. We had to work for the big land-

owner. I was given in marriage at sixteen and my husband and I kept on working for the landowner.

"Then my husband was taken to the war and they killed him. I was left with four children. I used to take them to the field with me. The little fellow lay on a sack and the others played around him in the dirt all day. As soon as they got big enough they would pick up potatoes to help me. Still it was hard to feed them."

After the revolution she was given six acres of land and a cow. But she had no horse. So she rented the land to a kulak and, like her father in the Tsar's time, went to work as a farm-hand. "Life was too hard alone," she told me. So in 1925 she joined the commune.

"Now 600 people live on the land that once belonged to one man. We've got 13,000 acres planted to rye, wheat, oats and millet. We've got 650 dairy cows and all the calves born in the last year. We've got 85 horses and don't need more because eight tractors do the heavy field work. We've got three threshing machines. All our harvesting is done by machine. There are a thousand sheep in our pastures and I don't know how many hogs . . ."

She listed every one of the commune's possessions. Each horse or cow, each additional acre of grain, represented an achievement—a step upward in the climb from poverty.

"We don't take new members into our commune any more. It's too big. But we help our neighbours start communes of their own."

The Lenin Commune is probably the oldest existing communal farm in the Soviet Union. Unlike the collective farms where the members divide the proceeds according to the amount of work they contribute, the commune feeds and clothes its members according to their needs, out of a common fund to which all contribute as they are able. This form of enterprise is closer to the Communist ideal than the collective farm, but, they say, as yet too advanced for most Soviet citizens.

The members lived in communal dwellings, one family to a room. The buildings were new, equipped with baths, showers, electricity and steam heat. One family to a room would have shocked me in America. For peasants who previously slept, ate, and bore their children in one clay-floored room of a peasant hut, and sometimes shared it with their pigs and chickens, it was luxury. Baths and electricity in the home were unheard of in the old days.

"We grown folks eat in a communal dining-room; our children eat together in a dining-hall of their own. They behave better without their parents. And besides, we have a special woman who knows what kind of food children should have so they will grow up big and strong."

"But don't you miss them when they're away from you so much?"

"But I'm away too," she said fervently. "How can I cook the right food for my children when I work all day? And besides, I don't want to stay in the kitchen all my life.

"Lenin said 'Every cook must learn to rule the state'. It's more interesting for me to work with other members of the commune to make our wheat grow better than to cook kasha for my children. What is kasha? You learn how to cook it once and it's the same thing always after that.

"But with farm work—that is different! Every day we learn something new. It's creative work!" "Tvorcheskaya rabota"—she must have heard it in a class somewhere but she used the term as though it were her own. She came back to my question.

"I have my children with me in the evening. I love them better because they're not a burden to me."

All children were taken care of in the communal nursery as soon as they were old enough. From the nursery they went into the kindergarten and then to the seven-year compulsory school. Further schooling was optional. Yegorova herself was attending at night the four-year workers' high school with her eldest son.

"I had a hard time because I was illiterate. Anybody could fool me. But my children will be well educated and nobody will pull the wool over their eyes. There's nothing to keep them from studying as long as they want."

Yegorova's mother and father also lived in the commune. "Even my mother works though she is sixty-two and gets a pension. In 1920 when I gave up ikons and church-going my parents called me a 'godless one' and wouldn't let me into their house. But now they say I shouldn't hold it against them because they didn't know any better. 'Did it help us to pray before?' they say. 'No. We live better now.' And they don't go to church any more." There was nothing about Yegorova's matter-of-fact voice that suggested the conflict this step had given rise to in the village.

We had talked away most of the lunch-hour. I walked with her to the crystal and gold dining-hall of the palace where peasant and worker delegates were eating. She had not even mentioned her election to the Central Executive Committee, no small honour even in a country where the lowly have been made mighty and the mighty have fallen. I asked her how she felt about it.

"It's very interesting to hear from other people about what is going on in our great country. Even though I follow the papers I didn't realize how little electrification there was in old Russia and how much we're getting now. It's good to hear what other people are doing and to tell them what we're doing in our district.

"But," with a frown, "there's so much noise here in Moscow. I'll be glad to get home where everything is still. And besides, soon it will be sowing time. We must look after the seed and be sure there's enough fertilizer. There's lots to be done. I want to get back to work."

. . . . .

Past the ancient church where lie the bones of Tsars long dead come men and women like Yegorova, bound

for Andreyev Hall to consult with their comrades about the future of new Russia.

Swirls of snow come blowing over the white parade ground; a deep bass rumble breaks through the clear air from the throats of Red Army men of the Kremlin detachment, responding to command. The gargoyle bulbs of St. Basil's Cathedral leer over the Kremlin Wall at the cluster of chaste white churches with their blue and golden domes. The metallic chimes of the tower strike the hour and bring back the days of old Russia.

Within the palace walls the proletarian rulers of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics are mounting the marble stairs to the famous Andreyev Hall which formerly received only the dignitaries of foreign lands and the splendidly attired princes of the Russias.

They ascend quickly, a quiet, orderly mass of men and women who come from the corners of the Soviet Union, from Karelia to Kazakstan. Shawled peasant women and men in the brilliantly-coloured flowing robes of the Uzbeks; handsome Georgians with daggers swinging from their waists and slant-eyed, yellow-skinned women from frozen Siberia. They take their places at narrow desks, completely filling the spacious chamber where are being held the sessions of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union.

Tall columns of the hall are lavishly covered with gold carving, above it the imperial double-headed eagle with wings outspread. Over each graceful window arch is the crest of one of the Tsar's regiments and over each crest the golden crown and cross of majesty. Hanging from the beautifully decorated dome of the room are gorgeous candelabra; in the glistening mirrors on one side of the hall are reflected the rich gold and clear white marble splendour of the other.

On the dais sit the members of the Presidium, men and women with heads bent beside green-shaded lamps, fingering sheaves of papers before them. Below, the speaker is

addressing the session, arm raised in earnest gesticulation as he tells of the development of electric power during the First Five-Year Plan. A picture of Lenin looks down on the gathering. Higher than crowns and crosses and golden candelabra is the red and gold of the hammer and sickle encircled in its sheaf of grain.

The session over, men and women hurry to their desks in another part of the palace. In the Blue Room they stand thumbing the pages of Karl Marx's *Capital*, looking over the pamphlets which tell of the place of science in the mechanization of industry, of the development of women in the Soviet east, of the organization of Communist Party work in the villages.

In the Hall of St. George, upon whose marble walls are engraved the names of wearers of the Tsarist Cross of St. George who alone were allowed to enter its famous portals, is an exhibit of goods now manufactured in the Soviet Union. There are models of factories and specimens of new agricultural products. In one section are charts printed in the Bashkirian language and a dark-eyed attendant who explains them to all who want to hear.

Under the magnificent carved marble ceiling sit young secretaries at their typewriters, pounding out reports that are still to be read in the sessions. Hurrying over the beautifully inlaid floors are the feet of old and young workers, workers who had trod the loam of rich black earth and the hard cement floors of factories. Together they are remaking the palace of the Tsars into the central workshop for the building of a socialist country.

CHAPTER XXII

THE YOUNGER GENERATION

I WAS RIDING IN to Vladikavkaz (Ordjonikidze) from nearby Beslan on the "5.15 local" one afternoon in August. It was hot—very hot—and the train was packed with perspiring commutors going home after the day's work. Wilted and dispirited, each sunk in his own weariness, they were as oblivious of their neighbours as of the clear blue beauty of the Caucasus range visible from the train windows.

Suddenly I heard singing, sweet, high and clear as a bell. Startled, I looked around, but my neighbours were silent, apparently as puzzled as I. The music stopped abruptly. A few minutes later it started again. I raised my eyes, looking for the cause.

High above us on the dusty baggage shelf just under the ceiling, lay a little boy with an incredibly dirty face and a merry, mischievous grin. He leaned his tousled head out perilously far over the edge of the shelf to laugh down at us.

The passengers suddenly woke to life.

"A bezprizorni!" (homeless waif).

"Hey! Come down!"

"Where'd *you* come from?"

"Well, you little devil, you!"

"Sing us another!"

Russians are friendly people and they like children. One after another began to grin, infected by the boy's merriment. Soon the whole carful had been drawn into lively chatter.

There was a stir at the car door.

"Jiggers, the conductor!" someone warned. The waif

ducked and lay quiet till the conductor passed. A pair of interrogating eyebrows and impish black eyes peered over the edge of the shelf.

Sure that the coast was clear, he climbed down and began to beg for kopeks. He was a cute little fellow, about twelve years old, barefooted, with grimy hands and a generous section of unwashed belly showing through a tear in his shirt. But he passed around a battered cap with all the assurance of a Caruso taking his bow at the Metropolitan.

"Don't give him a kopek," warned one old woman loudly. "The kid would steal the coat off your back if he got a chance."

"He wouldn't touch it!" said another heatedly. "I've seen him on this train lots of times. He never takes a thing!"

Others joined the argument.

"Well, you've got to be careful. Don't encourage these bezprizorni or they'll never settle down."

"Let them have a good time while they're young."

"He's probably run away from a perfectly good bezprizorni colony half a dozen times. They coddle these kids too much nowadays. Ought to lock them up!"

Meanwhile the young artist made the rounds. The woman who had defended him put her hand protectingly on his shoulder:

"Sing us a song, kid, then we'll give you something."

"Naw," he grinned. "Don't want to sing now."

"Go on, sing." She caught hold of his hand to urge him. He jerked away with a wildness startling and sudden. Quick as a deer, he leaped away, hurdling legs and bundles to the car door. There, sure of his independence, he eyed us defiantly, then suddenly melting into graciousness, began to sing.

It was a lament about the hard lot of the bezprizorni, sung to a mournful tune calculated to tug at his listener's

heartstrings—and purse strings. It closed with a stanza from the popular film about bezprizorni—"The Road to Life":

" . . . Ah, I'll die, I'll die,
They'll bury me
And no one will know
Where my grave is."

The car was silent as the boy finished. And in the brief moment he jerked off the battered cap, bowed dramatically, and intoned in the voice of a master of drama:

"Kind people—ladies and gentlemen—comrades and citizens—unbend, be gracious. Give a few kopeks to the future Feodor Chaliapin of the Bolshoi Theatre."

And while the gracious citizens unbent and he gaily flitted from one to the other, the train pulled in at Vladikavkaz. He made a dive for the door, and disappeared.

. . . . .

The editor of the Plavsk *Politotdelets* opened an envelope addressed in a childish scrawl and read:

"Respected Comrade Editor:

"Our teacher says that mothers should not whip their children. But my mother whips me. Do you think that is right?

"With Comradely Greetings, Petya Danishev, third grade, Vasilovka School.

The young man scratched his head. Editor of a weekly newspaper serving 30,000 collective farmers of lower Moscow Province, he was keenly aware of his responsibility before the community. The Soviet paper must be a "lever for the cultural advancement of the toiling masses". But on this issue—whether in a given instance, Petya Danishev should be spanked—determination of editorial policy was difficult. Yet the issue could not be ignored.

He thought for a few minutes—then called in a reporter.

A week later the *Politotdelets* came out with a two-page

spread devoted to Petya and his troubles. A top-right "box" held a facsimile of his letter. In the opposite corner of the page his mother was quoted:

"I can spank Petya whenever I want. It's not the business of the *Politotdelets* to tell me how to bring up my own children."

Other opinions filled the page.

The local doctor thought a child should have things explained to him. "If he understands, he will not misbehave."

Petya's older brother was not convinced. "My mother licked me when I was a kid and I'm none the worse for it. Petya's just a cry-baby."

The neighbour woman stated: "I've often heard Petya crying when his mother whipped him. I think she hits him too hard."

"The brat should be beaten for making his family the laughing stock of the district," opined Petya's father. "It would teach him not to tell tales."

Natashin, director of the Political Section of the Plavsk Machine Tractor Station, the most important man in the district, urged a campaign for a "more cultured approach to the question of child discipline". He suggested the slogan: "The new Soviet child requires new methods of education."

The teacher had a third of a column on the up-bringing of children; the head of the Plavsk militia (police) said it was his firm conviction there would be less delinquency if parents knew how to handle their boys. Various citizens of Vasilovka and neighbouring villages contributed their opinions to the symposium. The editor took half a column to sum up the arguments for and against whipping. He concluded that what the village of Vasilovka needed, and perhaps others in the district as well, was a conference on child discipline.

The conference was duly held in the district centre, attended by a hundred and fifty people who had come in

by sleigh from surrounding villages. Most were peasant mothers, but there was a sprinkling of teachers and nursery directors, two doctors, and trade union representatives from a small furniture factory located in Plavsk. One after another they came to the rostrum to give their views on child discipline. The concensus of opinion was expressed by Anna Kosareva, woman collective farm president:

"In the old days our mothers beat us. Some of us, too, in our ignorance, have whipped our children. But now we are becoming cultured people. Is it possible we can't make them understand without whipping? No! Now we know a different language."

Petya's mother came to the platform, a woman bronzed by the sun, with eyes almost obscured by wrinkles from a lifetime of hard work in the fields. She had brought up six children of whom Petya was the youngest.

At first she had vowed she would not come to the meeting. But her friends had said she would disgrace the whole collective if she stayed away. She was a good field worker, proud of her farm's successes. So she came and sat among her neighbours, listening attentively. All the while she rubbed a broken thumb nail with the heavy, gnarled fingers of her other hand. When they asked her if she cared to speak, she nervously tightened the ends of the kerchief under her chin and marched to the stage.

"Comrades," she said, "I see that I have been dark in the past. I will try to bring up my child in the new way."

I returned to Moscow and heard no more about the Petya incident until some months later when I picked up a copy of *Izvestia*, the official government organ, and read a quarter column story which began:

"The mother of Petya Danishev, who recently was criticized in the Plavsk *Politotdelets* for excessive whipping of her ten-year-old son, has enrolled in a night school in her village so that she may help the boy with his lessons at home. Petya has gotten

excellent grades in everything except arithmetic and his mother says she will learn arithmetic to help her boy reach the head of his class. . . ."

. . . . . .

Eleven-year-old Ruth Natashin was a child of a different feather. She would have appealed to no outsider for aid if ever her charming mother had laid a hand on her. On the contrary, I am sure she would have read her parent a severe lecture on the evils of corporal punishment.

Her background was very different from Petya's. Her parents were both cultured, sophisticated, city-bred people. Her father, a Communist since 1917, was one of the 2,500 "hand-picked" party members sent to the provinces in 1933 to head the vitally important political sections of the Machine Tractor Stations. Her mother was a statistician in the Commissariat of Agriculture.

From her fourth year Ruth had been a member of a Communist children's organization—first the "Octobrists" and later the "Young Pioneers". She knew her rights as a Soviet citizen and had all the self-assurance that marks the Young Pioneer.

At the age of five Ruth paid a visit to her grandmother and discovered her lighting candles for some religious observance. She was astonished but she knew what to do. Like a professor about to prove a geometric theorem, she began:

"Who are you praying to, Grandma? God in heaven? But look up there." She pointed a stubby little finger out of the window to the blue sky. "There is nothing up there. Only air. How can you pray to nothing?"

It is hardly necessary to add that Grandma was much offended by the temerity of the younger generation or that Ruth remained completely unimpressed by the peculiarities of the old.

When I met her she was eleven, strangely mature in some ways, quite like an ordinary child in others. She had cheeks

like red apples, a little snub nose, a rather large mouth and a voice husky from too much talking. Active Young Pioneers learn to make speeches early and well. The sparkle in her grey eyes was somewhat obscured by glasses.

"Do you think I look funny in glasses?" she asked with disarming frankness. "What I want is a pair of those round ones——"

She made a circle with her thumb and forefinger. "You know, the kind with the shell rims you Americans wear. But the bridge of my nose is too small to put them on."

She rubbed a sensitive finger over the too small bridge. I asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up.

"Either a doctor or an actress or a writer 'cause they always do different things," she explained. "A doctor sees different patients—treats different diseases. An actress plays different roles every time—a writer can make up anything he wants and that's his life."

She came to see me when she returned from a holiday in Plavsk, tanned and healthy and full of stories about village life. I told her a little about Korablino, the agricultural district I had recently visited.

"Oh yes, it's on the Red Board. We aren't." She meant that for completing the harvest early Korablino District had had its name inscribed on a public honour roll—the "Red Board". Plavsk District, where her father was then working day and night to speed the harvest, had lagged behind. Her voice dropped as she explained that though the collective farms of Plavsk had fulfilled their harvesting plan, the individual farmers were holding the district back. She was watching the papers now, expecting every day to see her father's district listed on the Red Board.

"How would you like to be a good party member like your father and be sent out to a village to work?"

"Oh, well," she laughed confidently, "if I were in the party I wouldn't have to decide what to do. I'd do whatever the party told me to."

Pa

Ruth was an incessant reader, unusually well-informed about what was going on in her country; she knew, too, a great deal of its background as brought out in its literature. Unlike most Soviet children, she cared nothing for sports. Like them, she was always busy.

She was an active leader in her school's Young Pioneer organization. She attended conferences and conducted meetings. Every now and then her Pioneer troop volunteered for a "subotnik"—unpaid work for the benefit of society, as, for example, planting flowers in the courtyard or collecting old galoshes to be used as rubber scrap. She went often to the zoo, occasionally with her parents to the cinema or theatre, but most frequently she went to the library.

Her "social work" as a Young Pioneer was to spend several hours a week at the Children's Library, advising younger children in their selection of books. She attended three "study circles" at the library each week—library methods, drama, and writing.

Some fifty youngsters in all attended the drama and writing circles. Guided by adult leaders, they poked their eager heads into the wonders of the literary world, and tried their young talents in writing and acting plays.

Ruth had a play produced at the library—"by Ruth Natashin, author", she told me with becoming pride as we strolled down the boulevard one bright fall afternoon. To have had a play staged at the age of eleven was no small accomplishment, I thought. But she did not make too much of it. Hers was only one of many.

Her writing circle had recently met with Lev Kassil—"to discuss his latest book, *Shvambrania*". (Kassil was probably the most popular children's author, and *Shvambrania* a delightful story of two imaginative children living in their own make-believe world at the time of the revolution.)[1]

[1] It was quite common for Soviet writers to discuss their works with groups of readers. I had attended meetings in which factory workers told a writer

"We told Kassil what we liked and what we didn't," said Ruth. "He said he'd come again. It helped him to talk with us."

The young literati did not limit themselves to criticism of contemporary works, however.

"A few days ago we discussed whether *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a good book for Soviet children to read.

"It makes one cry, you know." She smiled tolerantly, admitting it was a forgivable weakness to cry.

"Then there's a lot about God in it. And there's a lot about how the Negroes were exploited. Some kids thought because there was much we don't approve of in the book we shouldn't read it.

"But some, myself included, were for it," she continued. "If one doesn't believe in God one isn't suddenly going to start just because one *reads* about other people who do."

Ruth was not one to be weaned away from her beliefs by any novel. The youngsters agreed that stories about the exploitation of Negroes "would make us more anxious to fight exploitation of all kinds of people".

So these young Soviet citizens took a vote and decided that the book was suitable for the "more conscious children but not so good for the oung ones who do not know how to interpret it". There were many books the latter could begin on, they reasoned. Let *Uncle Tom's Cabin* be saved for a time when they could really understand it.

Our walk brought us around to a clock on the boulevard and Ruth noted the time. She turned to me in the manner of one of my friends casually ending a chat and said:

"By the way, do you know where the *Pioneer Pravda* editorial offices are located? I thought I'd go down to enter a play in their contest."

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why they thought his hero was unreal, how he might have made his plot more plausible. Budding authors in greasy overalls asked the writer how many times he re-wrote his book, what role he thought humour should play in socialist literature, what was the relationship of style to content. Judging by their frequency, such meetings were wanted by both writers and workers.

She patted a pocket where, out of the confusion of coins, pencils, and rubber bands, there projected a slim manuscript. I pointed the way to the *Pioneer Pravda* and she went swinging down the street, red kerchief flapping in the breeze like a symbol of the vigorous self-confidence that characterized the younger generation.

. . . . . .

Ruth was a child of the revolution and the Communist party. Everything about her reflected the vigorous self-assurance of that selected group of Soviet leaders of whom her father was so excellent an example. More than any other youngster I knew, she was free of the traditions of an older generation because her parents, too, lived completely in the present era.

Naomi and Leo were children of American prosperity. If there was any influence in their lives comparable to that of the Communist party in shaping Ruth's, it was the tabloid and the movie.

They were born in Hollywood of middle-class, Russian-Jewish parents. They had lived in a "good neighbourhood" with their fond mother and their father who was a successful small manufacturer of porch furniture. In America they had been the most thoroughly spoiled children of my acquaintance.

By sixteen Naomi had acquired a pout which would have done credit to her favourite movie actress, and a taste for pretty clothes which she wore with considerable grace despite her young-girl thinness. Her large grey eyes, fringed with black lashes, dropped in shy confusion when someone looked too admiringly at her. Because she was frail her parents indulged her. Father furnished the money and mother the time and patience to shop for French-heeled slippers to suit her fancy and cook delicacies to please her pampered palate.

Leo was two years younger, a hundred per cent American despite his parents' foreign accent, a baseball enthusiast,

an inveterate reader of wild-west stories and the comic strips. He, like his sister, had a passion for Hollywood's "million dollar" movies. He sulked and whined whenever necessary to gain his end, and was rarely refused anything.

In 1932 the parents decided to go back to Russia. Business had fallen off greatly. But what was worse, America was full of young people finishing school with no prospects of jobs. What better fate could they expect for their own children? Letters from the Soviet Union were full of hope. Russia seemed to be that land of opportunity which twenty years before they had sought to find in America.

Naomi's romantic soul was thrilled by the prospect of "going abroad", though she cried at the thought of leaving her boy-friend. Leo loudly declared that he would not go. But the furniture and the automobile were sold and in the spring of 1932, with tears and trepidation, they set sail. Leo's last-minute gesture of defiance was to run off the boat and hide on the dock in an attempt to be left behind in America.

When I arrived in Moscow a few months later, they were living with relatives, nine people in two rooms, because they could get no other quarters. The nerves of both families were becoming strained by the over-crowding. Father had gotten a good job buying hardware supplies for a large Moscow store. It was work he had done for his own profit before he left Russia. Now he worked on a salary and was already a Soviet enthusiast of the first order.

"What do I need with profits as long as I make a living and have no worries about the future? I travel three-quarters of the time and I have a chance to see how things are. Let me tell you, Russia is developing as it never could in the old days! Life is a little hard now but it's getting better fast."

For his wife, life was more than a little hard that year. She spent hours in queues every day shopping for her family. Household duties were infinitely more arduous than they had been in America; doubly hard because of

cramped quarters. She had a mop instead of a vacuum cleaner, a steaming tub in the kitchen instead of quick laundry service, a three-burner gas stove to share with another family. She was no longer young and the cold weather had revived a latent bronchial ailment. At night when she might have gone to theatre or lectures and enjoyed the better aspects of Soviet life, she was too weary to do anything but drop to sleep on her narrow army cot.

"For me it has been a change for the worse," she told me with a tired smile. "But we have no worries about the children's future. And for that reason I wouldn't go back to America."

Leo already knew the routes of all the tram lines in Moscow and the idiom of the school boys. His Russian was broken but uninhibited. Naomi, in sensible oxfords instead of pumps, confided when she met me:

'I think Russian clothes are so funny. The styles are what we had four years ago in Hollywood. And we don't have anything good to eat. Bread and tea for breakfast every morning and potatoes and fish for dinner every night. I eat it all right," she said with a little laugh and a shrug of the shoulders, remembering her fussy appetite at home. Her face was rounder than I had ever seen it and her colour was good.

"But I'm beginning to like it anyway. I got a big kick out of the May Day demonstration. The streets were full of people carrying banners and the kids danced on all the corners. Our school was in the third column from the mausoleum when we marched across Red Square. We saw Stalin, Gorki, Kalinin, and lots of others. I got a thrill out of it!"

She and Leo attended the Anglo-American school for English-speaking children. "Everything is so mixed up," she said. "Some of the kids in my room know lots more than others. I've had all the subjects. But I can't go to a Russian school till I learn the language so I have to stay there.

"Our best teacher is a Negro, Comrade W——. Imagine

what the kids in Hollywood would say about that! But I don't mind. We have lots of excursions to museums and factories. It's lots of fun. We went to a camp this summer. It was swell!"

In America Naomi had been too timid to go to a summer camp alone. Here the whole school went, boys and girls together, to spend a month in the country 300 miles from Moscow.

Their camp was shared by a Russian school. As a result Leo and Naomi formed many Russian friendships and began to speak the language fluently. Leo, a good athlete and a natural leader, was elected student head of the foreign group. Naomi, stronger than she had been in Hollywood, developed unsuspected talents as a volley-ball player "po Amerikansky" (in the American manner), as the Russians admiringly put it. Altogether it was a happy summer.

Leo was as enthusiastic about the Soviet Union as, six months before, he had been about America. Naomi put away at the bottom of the trunk her dainty American silk dresses. Heretofore she had kept them hanging back of the curtain in the corner and periodically looked them over with a wistful sigh.

"They're too fussy for Moscow," she told me now. "I like these skirts and cotton blouses the Russian girls wear."

In the fall she was admitted to an "Electrical Technicum", four-year school preparing technicians for the electrical industry. Biology was what she had wanted to study but Soviet planned economy intervened. Biologists and electrical technicians were both urgently needed, but since the Soviets had embarked on a great nation-wide electrification programme, demand for the latter was more acute. Schools for electrical technicians were expanded more rapidly than those for biologists. As a result, Naomi could enter an Electrical Technicum immediately but would have had to wait her turn for six months or a year to enrol in the Biology school.

Though she had been in the USSR only six months, she saw nothing unusual in preparing for a profession which very few girls in America would have dreamed of. The poor girl foundered at first. She spent as much as twelve hours a day over her books, lost weight, and cried because she could not understand physics and trigonometry in a strange language.

"All they do at school is study," she wailed. "The standards are lots higher than in America. And if I fail in one subject I'll be kicked out."

But Russian friends studied with her and she managed to pass all her examinations.

Leo entered a factory school where he alternated one day in the schoolroom learning the theory of machines and metals, and the next at a lathe learning the practice. He was paid thirty rubles a month at first and soon raised to sixty, which he proudly turned over to his mother every payday. So great was the demand for skilled labour that after eight months Leo and his class became regular half-time workers in a radio factory, continuing their "theoretical" study the other half of the day.

Now he was in his element—a worker in a workers' country. He became a shock worker and was given a special ration card and a raise. He bought himself a leather jacket like those worn by the other "men" in the shop, rightly considered himself a part of a great expanding industry. At fifteen he was studying half of each day, earning 100 rubles a month, and looking forward to a raise as his skill increased.

"When I'm a regular worker I'll start studying at night in the Workers' School. If I'm good the trade union will send me to a full-time University to study engineering. I'd like to be a bridge engineer."

Leo's pride in being a worker reminded me of a story then current in Moscow, illustrating the prestige attaching to the worker status:

An old-fashioned Jewish mother was supposed to have

resorted to that now extinct species, the professional matchmaker, to find a husband for her unlovely daughter. She handed over 1,000 rubles for the dowry and promised him a generous fee.

The next day the matchmaker came around, beaming. "You should see the son-in-law I've found for you! Such a smart young lawyer!"

"Lawyer! I give you a 1,000 rubles and you offer us a lawyer? Never!"

So the matchmaker, crestfallen, went out to do better. The next day he returned triumphantly—"I've got just the thing—a handsome doctor, head of a department in a Kharkov hospital!"

"Doctor, who wants doctors? Is my daughter a hunchback? A plague upon your doctors."

The unhappy matchmaker tried in turn to satisfy the ambitious mother with a teacher, a head-bookkeeper in a bank, and finally produced—"a professor!!—a little bald but very learned". The old dame would have none of them.

Finally, exasperated beyond control, the matchmaker flung the money down on the table, grabbed his hat, and shouted:

"And what do you expect for a 1,000 rubles in these days—a worker from the bench?"

Leo's voice was now a manly rumble and he was taller than his father. But he had grown too fast. He became very anæmic. In the winter when Naomi and one of his cousins got mild cases of 'flu, Leo caught it and developed pneumonia. His mother never left his side, the free clinic doctor came twice a day, and eventually he began to recover.

When he was convalescing I paid him a visit. He was lying on a narrow army cot six feet away from a cousin who was having his turn at the 'flu. I remember the large sunny sleeping porch Leo had had in Hollywood.

I had brought over some oranges, an imported product almost unobtainable that winter for Soviet currency.

"Swell orange juice," he said, smacking his lips when he tasted it.

"How'd you like to be back in California where you get a dozen oranges for a nickel?" I asked.

"Naw." Leo's weak voice was decisive. "Would I have any chance of a job? Jobs are scarcer in America than rooms are here. I hear from fellows over there once in a while. Even if you go through college you can't get a job. Here I'll always have work even if I quit school now. There'll be work for everybody here."

He had lapsed into Russian as he spoke because he no longer thought in his native tongue.

Naomi, too, had become acclimatized. In the summer of 1934 she came to see me, bringing a pair of expensive French-heeled slippers she had brought from America.

"Maybe you know some foreigner who wants to buy them. Or I'd trade them for a pair of oxfords," she said with an embarrassed smile. "I'd like some foreign shoes. Ours are impossible. They're ugly and uncomfortable. But you can't wear heels like this on Moscow's cobblestones."

She called the Soviet product "ours" even when condemning it.

A friend of a friend of mine knew an actor whose wife wanted French-heeled pumps. From somewhere the woman got a new pair of English oxfords to trade for them. When the deal was completed I telephoned Naomi. Delighted, she came for them immediately.

"Everything good comes at once. I've got some decent shoes. And school is over. No more exams. for a while. No more integral calculus!" She was jubilant and more talkative than usual.

"Next year'll be better. We'll spend more time in the factory. This year we worked only two months in the shop making transformer parts. My hands look just terrible from it. Look at these fingernails! But it was lots of fun. It makes all that maths. and physics interesting when you use it to make something.

"Yesterday all the students in Moscow had a big holiday in the Park to celebrate the end of school. We rowed on the river and went swimming. One of the boys in my class played his harmonica and some of the others danced. It was swell. There were thousands of us out there."

Naomi's eyes were shining with elation and her cheeks flamed. "You know I've been so busy studying I've hardly seen Moscow for months. But when we walked home from the park last night past that big new market near the river and saw the big hotel on Okhotny Ryad almost finished, I realized how the city had changed. Our country is growing before our very eyes."

CHAPTER XXIII

COMMUNIST AND NON-COMMUNIST

ALEXANDRA ANDREEVNA, BENDING her large grey head over some mending, was discussing "the Russian soul". In her forty-five years she had had ample opportunity to observe the Russian character. Born the daughter of a poor tanner in a provincial town, after the revolution an assistant to Lenin's wife in the first proletarian University, she was now a teacher of factory workers.

"Take my milkwoman, for example," she said. "She's almost illiterate. Yet when she mimics the speech of her neighbours it seems as though I'm in the Moscow Art Theatre. If she had grown up in this generation her talent would not have been wasted. So much genius—yet how childlike she is.

"For years she's supported herself, her four children and her lazy husband by bringing milk into the city every morning to sell. One day she told me:

"'Well, I've divorced my old man. Got tired of feeding him all these years. Went to the registry office and filled out the papers. Let him go and shift for himself.'

"I congratulated her. But a few weeks later she complained to me again as she'd been doing for years. Her good-for-nothing husband wouldn't look for a job.

"'But I thought you divorced him!' I said.

"'I divorced him all right,' she replied. 'But he's got no place to go. I can't chase him into the street. And when I give the children dinner I can't let him go hungry. So there he stays, just like he did before.'"

Alexandra laughed softly and her eyes were warm with understanding.

"A lovable creature—our Russian peasant. But how childlike!"

Alexandra placed a patch on her worn skirt and began to sew. I could see only the top of her impressive head, covered with thick, bobbed, grey hair. Of that head a hat saleswoman a few days before had impatiently observed: "Such a large head! Just like Marx!"

You would have noticed her on the street car any day. Not because of her faded coat and worn hat and the handbag with the strap torn off. That one could find often enough on other people too. There was something about the way she held herself that set her apart.

And if you were short enough to see under the hat, the face would have impressed itself on your memory—broad furrowed forehead, broad cheekbones, broad nose, grey skin mottled by years of ill health. If she felt well the hazel eyes would be infinitely alive and receptive. If she felt ill they would be dull and unseeing.

I met her first in America. That was in 1923 when she came to visit her brother who was a neighbour of ours. In that Southern California sun I saw her recover from the ghastly effects of years of war and revolution, famine and typhus. But never can I forget her green blotched skin and the sickness in her eyes when she arrived.

I knew little about her then. She rarely talked before strangers. More often than not she would abruptly walk out of a room when one entered. But in Moscow I learned her story.

She told me about the famine of 1921-22 when she had lived for two years on a pound of bread a week and a few potatoes and little else . . . how she sobbed hysterically when a visitor from the village brought her a loaf of bread as a gift . . . how she followed for many blocks one murky Moscow twilight a man who carried unwrapped a large loaf of bread under his arm. Not to steal it—just to look and conjure up in her half-sick brain, visions of how he would bite into it when he arrived home.

In 1918 she had lost her dearest sister and only remaining relative in the Soviet Union. The sister was nursing soldiers behind the western front. Typhus broke out. One night Alexandra, weakened by insufficient food, woke terrified from a dream that her sister was dying of typhus.

For all her study of Marxian philosophy she had a broad streak of superstition and she could not disregard the dream. She fought like one possessed for a place on the weekly train that went from Moscow to the Polish border.

The railroad lines were black with trains moving east. War-weary soldiers packed the coaches, clung to the steps, slept on top of freight cars. Some died of typhus and their bodies rolled off unnoticed as the trains moved slowly home towards their native steppes. The transportation system that had been Russia's ruin in the war, almost collapsed. Alexandra's train took a week instead of a day to reach the front.

When she arrived her sister was well and laughed at her for believing in dreams. But a week after Alexandra returned to Moscow the sister contracted typhus and died.

One thing assuaged Alexandra's grief—her love for a Communist leader. But the man was married. At that critical time it would have discredited him and damaged the cause of his party if he cast off his old wife and took a new one.

Alexandra, who had refused membership in the Communist Party for the reason that she "had not joined before the revolution when it was dangerous", believed that the Communists would build a new world in backward Russia. Beside this her personal happiness was nothing. The only really important thing was to work for the cause. Supported by this fanatical devotion to her ideals, she told her lover to go one night and never saw him again.

She fell ill immediately after, hovered for many months between life and death. When half-recovered, feeling herself unable to work, a burden to her struggling country, she consented to go to her brother in California.

She hated America's "soft living and the cold way in

which everybody feathers his own nest. In my country people suffer and die. But those who remain are building a new life." As soon as her health improved she began a two-year fight to return to Russia. Permission was refused. She had left when Russia needed her. . . . She wrote again, pleaded in other quarters. Finally, through the influence of important friends, she was permitted to return.

The "hungry years" have left their imprint on her soul as well as her body. Today she has an almost pathological fear of famine. Most hardships her fellow Russians have lived through she sweeps away as insignificant when compared with the goal. But the thought of hunger makes her almost hysterical. She never throws away the stalest crust of bread, though she does not hesitate to discard left-over foods much more expensive.

Her independent spirit and stubborn devotion to what she considers right bring her into frequent conflict with people less zealous than she.

When I arrived in Moscow she was engaged in a feud with the director of her factory school. He was a young man, a factory worker who had been sent to school and then given this job—not because he was particularly well-equipped for it but because of his record in production and in social work, and because he was a good Communist. (There was still a tendency in many institutions to favour Communists for administrative posts although the trend had been away from this practice in recent years. In the early days of the revolution it was vitally important to have Communists in many of the responsible positions owing to the danger of sabotage by elements of the "technical intelligentsia" opposed to Soviet policy.)[1]

[1] Many physicians and nurses walked out of the Moscow hospitals immediately after the October revolution, disregarding not only their humanitarian obligation to citizens of the capital but to three thousand wounded men pouring in daily on hospital trains from a war for which the Bolsheviks were not responsible. Their object was to bring about a complete collapse of normal life under the Bolsheviks, undermine their standing and eventually bring about their downfall.

This story was told me by Sophie Andreevna Simeonova, a nurse and a

Alexandra's chief at first tried to learn something about the job he had been assigned. But a little sip of power went to his head and he began to rule with a high hand. It happened that Alexandra was an excellent teacher. She had been the only non-Communist school superviser in the city till she resigned because of ill health. So now when the director of her school issued stupid arbitrary orders which interfered with the work she at first remonstrated and eventually refused point blank to carry them out.

He fired her. She carried her fight to the trade union, determined not merely to get back her job but to see that the school was rid of an incompetent. The other teachers would not back her up.

"They're weak servile creatures. You wouldn't find workers in the factory swallowing everything the way teachers do!" she told me scornfully. Often I had heard her condemn the docility of the people in her profession. Too many were trained in the old days, she said, when a teacher did not raise his voice against orders from above.

The best of the new generation went into industry and science, the left-overs into teaching. Not till the shortage of trained people was less acute would her profession draw men and women of high quality.

When her own trade union "local" failed her, Alexandra went to the management of the factory to which her school was attached, to the Moscow Board of Education, to the newspaper of the teaching profession, *For Communist Education*. The editors investigated, became convinced her charges were correct, printed long articles about teachers' rights versus directors' self-importance.

Sick from a heart attack brought on by the emotional strain, Alexandra rose from bed to plead before an investigating commission:

". . . Rid our schools of parasites, these good-for-nothings who take the joy out of work and our new life."

revolutionary, who recruited laymen in mass meetings to staff the hospitals and organized an emergency medical service in the city.

The director lost his job, she was reinstated, and several other Moscow factory schools got a good shake-up as a result of her battle.

She was exhausted but proud when she told me about it.

"In your country a teacher couldn't oppose a stupid order and oust a principal. I know—I visited plenty of your schools. I've seen how your teachers 'yes' their superiors. Here we've got parasites still but we've got weapons with which to fight them.

"There are petty people among the Communists, too, like my precious director. But you see how I, a non-Communist, oppose him and win."

Some time later she denounced him at the Communist Party purging.

"I hated to do it," she told me. "It's an awful disgrace to be expelled from the party and he's not a bad young man whom I wish to harm. But he had to be taught a lesson while he was young. If he'd gotten away with this high-handedness he'd have been ruined for life.

"Now he's gone back to a job at the bench. Maybe he'll still be a useful citizen and a good Communist."

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Many different points of view towards the Communist Party and towards Soviet life in general, met over the little sink in the hall where Alexandra and her neighbours drew the water for their tea.

There was the charming Zenaida, a Communist and the wife of a Communist. She was beautiful. Her delicate skin flushed when she talked, her hair curled into soft golden tendrils round her face. She had the musical voice one finds often in cultured Russian women.

She was an economist and her husband an engineer. They had been married six years but because of interest in their work had never been able to live together more than a few months at a time.

First she was chosen to work in the Soviet consulate in Paris. Just before she returned he was sent to build a factory in the Far East. She went to him there but an interesting job in Moscow drew her back. When he was transferred to Moscow she was assigned to work in the Ukraine. And so it went on. Communists more self-seeking might have arranged work to suit personal convenience a little more. But these put their work first.

"That's what it means to be a Communist," she told me, philosophically. "Your life isn't your own. But it's an interesting life." She began telling me of the state farm she had organized near Odessa. It was hard to imagine her in boots tramping across fields with semi-literate peasants.

A few months after I met her she received a letter from her husband, informing her that he loved another woman and was divorcing her. She told Alexandra about it quietly, without tears. But that night the older woman heard her muffled sobbing as she passed in the corridor.

"She thought, like many Communists, that she could hold him way out there in Khabarovsk," Alexandra told me. "She knew he had women friends, just as she had men friends here. 'Neither of us is a stone,' she used to say. But he remained for her the loved husband to whom she would some day be joined.

"And now that hope is crushed. Well—too bad. But she takes it like a Bolshevik."

The greatest compliment one can pay a Communist is to call him a Bolshevik. The word carries all the implications of strength, courage, fearlessness, which marked the Communists who risked their lives in the underground days before the revolution.

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Olga Dmitrovna, who lived in the room at the end of the hall, was a Communist and a "vidvizhenka", a worker pushed forward from the ranks to a position of responsibility. Personally she was a very ordinary creature—

plodding, loyal, and unimaginative. As a vidvizhenka, however, she was interesting.

After twenty years at the loom in a textile mill, she was being sent to a Workers' School to receive what amounted to a secondary education. When she finished she would go back to the mill to become manager of a department, of the factory restaurant, or creche. This is one way the Soviets have of getting the trained people for whom there is such crying need.

Olga had a lovely child of ten whom she neglected completely for this career which had been thrust upon her. Unlike millions of Russians, both young and old, who are consumed with the desire to learn, she had no joy in her opportunity. Her mind, mediocre to begin with, was stiff after years in the mill, no longer receptive to ideas that had to be dug out of books. For a year she plugged doggedly at her studies because the party had sent her to school and she must justify its faith in her. In the end she made some excuse and went back to the bench, shamefaced at her failure, but relieved.

Her husband, Ivan, was a quiet tired man, better educated than she. He had been purged from the Communist ranks some years before.

". . . Because I changed my job without the party's approval," he told me. "They said I transferred because I wanted something easy."

Later, when I witnessed some of the party purgings, I realized there must have been other reasons as well. But probably they were sins of omission rather than commission. He was a weak, sentimental person who did not have the stamina to be always a leader as the Communists demand of their members.

He worked hard at his job of organizing factory branches for the Society of Aerial and Chemical Defence. He was in sympathy with the Soviet system, he said, but ". . . a non-Communist feels himself a little left out in the cold, as though what is going on here isn't ours to share".

When I told Alexandra this she said: "Humph . . . I don't feel left out."

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Her charming neighbour, Sergei, a non-Communist, was an assistant director of an important industrial trust, a high position for a non-party member. He used to tell me with much pride about the huge new factories he visited in the course of his work.

He had fought in the Red Army during the Civil War. He said it was because he was a Jew and the Bolsheviks were the only ones who did not make the Jews suffer when they gained control of a town. But he had his reservations about the Bolsheviks after civil war was over.

"I agree with them in general. But not in everything. For instance, I think it would've been better not to industrialize the country so rapidly. The burden is too heavy for the people to bear."

Alexandra put in emphatically: "If we hadn't built up our industries we'd have been crushed by some foreign power long ago. It's not a question of what is *desirable*. It's what is *necessary* that guides us!"

"Well, the Communists didn't ask me," he smiled, "and I remain with my own opinion. If I were a Communist I'd have to champion everything the party did whether I believed in it or not. For that reason I don't belong.

"But I'm an honest man," he added, "I do my work well." His responsible position testified to that.

Once when I knew him well we sat over a glass of tea and he told me a little wistfully of his past. His father had been a wealthy manufacturer and he a gay youth whose only thought was pleasure. He showed me a picture of himself, handsome and dashing, on a fine horse. He spent summers in a mansion on the Black Sea, winters attending balls and courting pretty women. Life was carefree and easy.

"This is a life for a martyr, not for an ordinary man," he said bitterly, coming back to the present.

"How do I live now?—I have a bed in my cousin's house. I must leave my wife and child in Kharkov because nowhere in Moscow can I find a room for them. I earn a fair salary but what can I buy for it? This poorly-cut factory suit and these shoes," he looked down at his much-mended shoes, pathetically shabby under their careful polish.

"I rarely go to the theatre because my work takes all my time. For the same reason I never see my friends. I can't even read, I'm so busy.

"It's all very well to build for the future. And we are doing great things—we are building a society that in time will make the civilization of Western Europe and America seem like barbarism.

"But I've got only one life to live," wistfully, almost bitterly. "I'd like to have a little leisure and beauty now—for myself, not just for my children."

Whereupon he apologized for burdening me with his troubles and rose to go. Tomorrow morning he was taking a train to Samara to begin reorganizing a factory on more efficient lines. Obviously it was not against the Soviets he talked, since he worked so faithfully for them. But he rebelled against a fate that deprived him of the beautiful life his youth had promised.

Even Alexandra, who wanted little of the good things of life, did not censure this man who wanted much.

CHAPTER XXIV

NON-SOVIET CITIZENS

ALEXANDRA'S NEIGHBOURS, WHATEVER their attitude toward the Communist party, were all clearly "Soviet" people, whose habits and thoughts showed the influence of the life around them. But I knew three Soviet citizens who no more reflected Soviet life than if they had lived in Chicago or Paris or, half a century before, in Russia.

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Olga was a pretty spoiled woman of twenty-eight in Moscow who earned her living but tried to forget that unpleasant fact. She had pink cheeks and blue eyes and a mincing little walk that betrayed the flirt.

Hers had been a middle-class family, whose older daughters married prosperous men and became "kept" wives in the tradition of their day. By the time Olga grew up, however, prosperous men were taboo so she went to work. And, being so unlucky as to capture the attentions of a Communist who refused to divorce his wife for her, instead of a man who would keep her in the style to which she hoped to become accustomed, she continued to earn her own living.

She was a technician in a Moscow medical laboratory. She worked seven hours a day and attended classes a few hours a week "to raise her qualifications", not because she was interested in raising her qualifications but because public opinion made it almost compulsory. As a matter of fact she was afraid that if she completed the course she would be assigned to work in the provinces.

"Imagine *me* out in some Siberian village! After living three years in Paris. Simply awful!" (She had worked as a clerk in the Soviet trade delegation in Paris.)

Newly-graduated physicians, engineers, technicians and so on were often sent to the provinces for a few years before assignment to more desirable posts. The Soviets argue that since these people are educated at public expense they must serve the public where it needs to be served.

Olga vowed that through acquaintances she would "fix it" so that she would not have to go to the provinces. Her brother, a Communist in a high post, refused to help her. Whether or not her lover "fixed it" I never knew but he was not above using his position to gain favours for petulant little Olga. He had obtained for her a free pass to a rest home supposed to be reserved for the families of Red Army men and in addition, a free railroad ticket to the resort, when it was difficult to get tickets for honestly-earned money.

Although she received her full share of benefits from the government, Olga displayed absolutely no interest in the country. She did not even read the newspapers. Only once in ten months did I hear her discuss a subject of general interest. That was when three young men ventured into the stratosphere and crashed to earth when something went wrong with their balloon, a misfortune that jolted even Olga out of her preoccupation with herself.

Her interests were exactly those of a pampered pretty young woman in America . . . men, love, clothes, and whether or not to dye her hair. She was blue when she had no new dress to wear, cross with her lover because he did not come often enough from his post in Esthonia to see her, happy when she had another admirer to while away the time in his absence. The claws were so poorly hidden in her soft paws that admirers were few, and this bothered her most of all.

Her general mood was one of envy that other people should be more fortunate than she. She vented her spleen by browbeating people who were in any way dependent upon her good will, chiefly her poor old mother, whom she scolded till the woman left the house in tears. Having thus relieved herself, Olga would telephone some friend, recount

the whole story in detail and get all the sympathy she deserved. Feeling better, she would change her dress and go out humming to have her hair done.

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In Tiflis I met a hero out of a Dostoevsky novel.

I had been a great admirer of the writer whose unhealthy types so many foreigners considered "typically Russian". In order to read him in the original, I had studied Russian in college long before I dreamed of coming to his native land. But I did not expect to meet a Dostoevsky character in the flesh, so to speak, in a healthy virile Russia that had no time or place for the sick souls he portrayed.

From the dark balcony one night there emerged into the lamplight of the room where we were drinking tea, a short, stocky, bearded creature with a nervous laugh that bared his red gums and ugly teeth. The dim light accentuated the bulge over his eyebrows, beneath which a pair of frenzied blue eyes darted over everything in the room and rested nowhere.

My friend Kolya greeted him warmly, and the visitor, catching Kolya's eye on his beard, laughed shrilly:

"I'm to play in a new film—'Tiflis Past and Present'. And what role do you think I'm to have? The son of the former governor of Tiflis! Ironic, eh? They say I look as though I were born for the part." Again he burst into shrill laughter.

"And some people say I look like Dostoevsky." He was obviously pleased. "Do you think so?" Without waiting for an answer he began talking of something else, jumped to another subject. Thus for an hour, until he left as suddenly as he had come.

I turned to Kolya who was looking after his retreating back with mingled affection and concern.

"Poor old Andre," he said slowly. "The odd thing about it is that he really *is* the son of a former Russian governor of Tiflis. His father was a just man and after the revolution

when most Tsarist officials had to flee, he was not bothered. He's dead now. And his son, you see, half mad. He was confined to an institution a while ago and now he's writing a novel about it."

Since his boyhood Andre had periodically gone into the mountain fastnesses to live with the Hefsuri, a backward Caucasus tribe thought by many scientists to be descendants of the Crusaders. Centuries ago they had been driven up into glacier-locked valleys, inaccessible for nine months each year. At the time of the revolution civilization had hardly touched them. They were still fighting blood feuds in coats of mail. Andre had led a number of expeditions which the Soviet government sent to study the Hefsuri and their hidden valleys.

Andre wrote poetry. He translated verse from Georgian into Russian, with rare genius according to Kolya. Unscrupulous poets of both nationalities paid him a trifle for his translations, and published them under their own names. Until recently when someone had gotten him a job editing a factory newspaper, Andre had been on the verge of starvation, though writing was a well-paid profession in the USSR.

"He's like Dostoevsky's *Prince Mishkin*," Kolya's sister summed up. "He's so generous, un-selfseeking, so unable to look out for himself that other people think he's an idiot and profit at his expense."

He came a number of times to talk with Kolya about his book. Once he spent an evening telling me about the Hefsuri.

He became excited, grabbed a paper and drew a costume, a headdress, a sabre—to illustrate what he was saying. He turned the paper this way and that, feverishly drawing, crossing out, drawing again, talking so rapidly I missed half of what he said. He seemed happier than when I had seen him with his literary friends.

"Read us some of your poetry, Andre," requested Kolya when he pushed the drawing-paper aside and sat back.

Without a word he stood up. His nervousness was gone. With eyes downcast, rhythmically stroking the palm of one hand with the forefinger of the other, he recited his verse. Here was simplicity, rhythm, dignity, everything that was missing in him, all the more beautiful because it emphasized his own lack of harmony with his surroundings and himself.

The last time I saw him he was turning back from the door of the theatre to which he had accompanied us. Among the gay crowd hurrying to the evening's pleasure, his slightly stooped figure looked pitifully helpless and forlorn.

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Maria was twenty, the daughter of an eminent scientist whom the Soviets honoured by giving his widow a generous pension and the right to keep a five-room house for her own use. The widow promptly let two of the rooms at exorbitant prices, accepting as roomers only Englishmen or Americans because Maria was learning English and the practice in conversation would be helpful to her.

As a matter of fact, Maria knew English almost as well as I. She spoke it in a quiet, musical voice that was her greatest charm. Her library of English and American authors I would have envied in America. For her graduate thesis at the University she was translating a Galsworthy novel into Russian.

Better than English Maria loved the Chinese language, of which she had learned a little from a friend of her father's.

"It is such a beautiful, subtle tongue. I would like to study it at the Oriental Institute. But that's only for Communists." She smiled ruefully.

This special school, training men and women for diplomatic and consu'ar service in the east, chose students whose loyalty to the Soviet system was unquestioned. Maria, daughter of a once-privileged class, did not fall in that

category. The University, however, was as free to her as to other Soviet students.

Maria wore gloves even in summer. That placed her fairly well in the Soviet world where everybody else wore gloves only to protect their hands from cold. She walked gently, talked in exquisitely modulated tones.

She knew every subtlety of shade and texture on the paintings in the Museum of Western Art. Classes from the University went to the museum. But Maria went alone or with a carefully-chosen friend. She wanted no strident-voiced guide to show her these treasures. Over-simplified explanations of the class interests of the artists or their position in the art world offended her aesthetic sense.

Soviet poetry about factories and coal diggers and collective farms interested her not at all. She wanted to read pure verse whose form was unmarred by socialist realism.

We usually talked about literature. Only once did Maria comment on her fellow students, with an expression of pain on her fair face.

"They're so casual about everything. They don't respect the old professors, nor have reverence for the old literature. They've no *reverence* for anything!" she summed up impatiently.

That was certainly true. Reverence is not a trait of new young Russians. They have curiosity and interest and admiration for many things, but reverence for nothing.

Maria was sensitive, intelligent, discriminating, cultured. But contemplation of the little packages of culture inherited from the past occupied her to such an extent that she could not participate in the creation of a healthy new culture in the life around her.

She was not anti-Soviet. She agreed that the wealth of the country should belong to all the people. She admitted that the proletariat should be educated to the beauties of Gaugin. But all this bringing of culture down to the level of the masses offended her finer instincts.

She was a "lady" above all things and she wanted life to be "nice". Soviet life was not ladylike and nice. It was turbulent and active—noisy and little concerned with giving pure aesthetic satisfaction to the few who could enjoy it. So she turned her back on Soviet life and tried to live in an imaginary world of her own. I suspect that Maria lost far more than the Soviet system thereby.

CHAPTER XXV

SOVIET MUCKRAKING—AND "PURGING" OF A CAREERIST

AN AMERICAN ENGINEER came into the *Moscow News* office one day with a long tale of woe. He had been brought to Moscow to install American cafeteria equipment to improve service in the factory restaurant of one of the city's largest plants, the Ball Bearing Works.

"The plans were approved ten months ago. Twelve thousand dollars' worth of American equipment is here, lying around in open sheds getting spoiled. But I can't get the word to go ahead. They're paying me a good salary but it's an utter waste of the country's money. Meanwhile two thousand workers at the plant have to stand in line half an hour every day to get a third-rate meal in a noisy overcrowded mess hall. What can you do about it?"

The charge that foreign machines and specialists were going unutilized was, unfortunately, a common one. One of the *Moscow Daily News*' main functions was to see that complaints of foreign engineers and workers reached the proper authorities and were acted on.[1] I was assigned the job of investigating this particular one.

For four days I went from one person to another, from factory kitchen to director's office, questioning and cross-questioning officials of the half-dozen organizations involved. The Commissariat of Supplies, the Moscow Restaurant Trust, even the Moscow Soviet, all were in some degree concerned with the buying and installing of the equipment.

[1] Every Soviet paper had a "mass department" which did this for its particular group of readers. One of the department's main tasks was to develop among its readers "worker-correspondents" who kept the paper in touch with what was going on in their enterprise to an extent quite impossible with the regular staff.

Principal responsibility rested, however, on the foreign department of the Moscow Restaurant Trust. It had actually ordered the equipment, recalled the engineer, Evans, from a holiday in America to draw plans for installing it, and had sixteen skilled American food workers brought to Moscow to operate it. Careful investigation showed that the head of the foreign department, Maria Mikulina, was responsible for the following conditions:

1. Neglect of twelve thousand dollars' worth of foreign equipment paid for in gold.
2. Failure to utilize the services of Evans, for which the Soviet Union was paying out a high salary in gold rubles.
3. Ten months of inactivity after the plans had been approved.

Mikulina had made no step to start reconstruction of the factory kitchen necessary before the American equipment could be installed. This delay was the more serious since it involved not merely the one plant. The intention was to test out American methods in this particular factory kitchen and restaurant. On the basis of this experience plans would be drawn, it was hoped, for countless other factory restaurants throughout the Soviet Union. Thus the delay was preventing adoption of more efficient methods in hundreds of plants. Engineer Evans claimed that the Ball-Bearing Plant, serviced with American equipment, could serve 50 per cent more people than it was then doing, in the same amount of time.

Having got sufficient information, I smuggled a photographer into the factory kitchen and got pictures of a ridiculous "puree machine", which was about as far as the existing kitchen went in mechanizing its work. This remarkable contrivance, powered by a 1½ h.p. motor, mounted on a six-foot platform, operated with a complicated series of pulleys, levers and wires that made it too heavy for any woman to move, could mash all of seven pounds of potatoes at a time—for a plant serving thousands of workers.

The *Moscow Daily News* came out with a big front-page story, featured by appropriately captioned pictures of the "puree machine" and the shed full of modern cafeteria machinery. The pictures made the Moscow Restaurant Trust ridiculous, but the story contained well-substantiated charges of gross inefficiency and neglect on the part of Mikulina. Much of the damning evidence was the contradictory, evasive and untrue statements made by the woman herself attempting to evade responsibility.

Mikulina was Russian born, still under thirty—large, good-looking, energetic and ambitious. Her parents had taken her to America in the early days of the revolution. She returned to Moscow at the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan, not because she was devoted to the cause of the revolution but because the greatly expanding Soviet Union offered opportunities for a career such as she could not have hoped for in America. (This at least was the explanation of a devoted party member who had known her for years in the United States. My acquaintance with Mikulina gave me no cause to doubt its truth.)

After we had run our first story she arrived at the *Moscow News* office with flushed cheeks. Pounding on the desk where I was busy typing out the next instalment, she demanded that I stop immediately. Then she swept into Borodin's office, flanked by a much-cowed male assistant who was to corroborate her statements and prove mine wrong.

Borodin called me in after half an hour.

"What's your side of the story?"

I told him. Mikulina called me a liar. I reminded her that in the interview I had taken her statements down word for word and read them to her before leaving her office. We went over the notes. She denied her own words and those of her colleagues, implying that I, a non-Communist, should certainly not be believed in preference to a party member. Borodin, a Communist of higher calibre, asked a few questions, and told me to go ahead.

Our function as a newspaper was merely to bring such

cases to the attention of the proper authorities. The first result of our exposé was the appointment of an investigating committee by the All-Union Council of Trade Unions, to consist of representatives from the Central Committee of Public Feeding Trusts, the foreign bureau of the All Union Inventors' Society, the All Union and City Council of Trade Unions, and the *Moscow News*. Shortly thereafter the matter was taken up by the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, which then existed to straighten out such muddles, and we dropped out of the picture.

The machinery was eventually obtained for a cafeteria in the Park of Culture and Rest in Moscow. Evans returned to America, one more of the foreign engineers who could not adjust himself to the difficulties of working in the USSR.[1]

Mikulina's case was followed up in more significant and dramatic fashion.

. . . . .

The Communist Party held its third major purging since the revolution in 1933–34.[2] All residents,—Communist and non-Communist, worker and housewife, native and foreigner,—were urged to write letters or appear in person before the Purging Commission at the purging of anyone about whom they knew important relevant facts.

[1] Untrained people trying almost overnight to establish and run all the great variety of complex enterprises that make up a modern industrial society, could naturally not do it efficiently at first. Add to this colossal difficulty of the Soviets the disadvantages of shortage of materials and equipment, inadequacy of transport, and the constant danger of sabotage (necessitating the checking and rechecking of every step before it was taken), and one gets an inkling of some of the problems faced by every worker in Soviet enterprise at this period. Foreigners, as a rule, were no exception. Used to functioning efficiently in their own countries, they often felt (as sometimes they were) wasted in the USSR.

[2] The party purge is defined by Sidney and Beatrice Webb as a public inquisition into the character and conduct of party members, with the intention of eliminating those considered unworthy of retention in the party. According to the declaration of the Central Committee of the party in 1933: "... only those comrades may remain in the party who ... place the interests of communism and the party above everything."

Party members are judged by an appointed Purging Commission of three, the members of which have previously undergone the same examination before a higher commission.

In due course of time Mikulina's day arrived and I was asked to tell what I knew about her.

There were approximately two hundred people in the small hall where the purging was held. Behind a table covered with red bunting sat the members of the Commission—two middle-aged men and a grey-haired woman chairman. Mikulina was called to the stand and she came up, apparently self-confident as usual, though it was common knowledge that Communists of long standing were fearful of the purge, at which anyone might suddenly rise to remind him of past transgressions. She was wearing a simple skirt and cotton blouse instead of her usual well-cut silk.

She gave her "social origin", told in detail how she had studied and worked to get back to the land of her birth. Then she told, briefly, of her work since returning. When she sat down the chairman quietly called for statements from those who knew Mikulina.

A dozen people talked, and some at length. First came the underlings who praised her in an attempt to ingratiate themselves with the chief, and others who were no doubt honestly impressed by her show of energy. But attack came immediately afterwards.

"She takes a high and mighty bureaucratic attitude toward her subordinates—never asks for suggestions and won't listen when we're unable to hold our tongues and speak out. . . ."

"She's done nothing whatever to train us young workers." This charge, from a responsible source, the secretary of the Komsomol unit in her organization, was most serious. In every Soviet enterprise, technical training of employees to meet the constant demand for skilled "cadres" is one of the important obligations of management.

"She didn't want to inconvenience herself enough to put any of that American food machinery on exhibition at the All-Union Conference of Food Workers. Restaurant managers from all over the Union would have benefited by seeing it. The only display was a miserable five-dollar

exhibit labelled 'foreign equipment'. Now I ask, how are we ever going to 'overtake and surpass' America if bureaucrats like Mikulina don't even let us see what's being done abroad?"

An expert American food worker said: " . . . She wouldn't let me set up the dough mixer and automatic dough divider. I have to use peasant girls entirely to prepare 15,000 rolls a day by hand. I could have installed the machine in less than two hours without rearranging anything in the kitchen."

A Russian cook from the plant popped up:

"What did she care for your opinion? I heard her say once those American cooks were only a bunch of Bronx Jews anyway and there was no use listening to anything they said. . . ."

The audience gasped. Anti-semitism from a Communist!

The "purging" continued for two hours. When my turn came I told the story of my acquaintance with Mikulina, concluding that she was a bureaucrat and a liar, who sought to cloak her own highhanded inefficiency by deception. If a Communist was supposed to be a leader and example to the masses of the people, she was unworthy of being a Communist.

The chairman of the Commission skilfully, briefly, questioned those who testified, asked for written statements, referred to material the Commission had already received about Mikulina. She appeared very capable and just, allowing no one to indulge in what appeared to be just spiteful name-calling.

"Anyone else wish to speak?" she asked each time one person had finished. When no one else rose Mikulina was dismissed.

Some days later the results of the Purging Commission's investigation were posted in the Moscow Food Trust Building. Mikulina was demoted to the rank of "candidate" for admission to the Communist Party. Candidates in white-collar jobs had to be on probation for ten years.

After that, having proved themselves worthy, they might become full-fledged members of the Communist Party.

Expulsion or demotion from the Communist Party could not be cause for dismissal from one's job. But Mikulina had been proven a failure in her work. Anticipating discharge, she resigned. When I last heard of her she had taken a job as manager of a small factory kitchen in Moscow and was beginning from the bottom, to work her way up again to the high place she coveted.

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A fitting conclusion of this story is the answer a non-Communist worker made to me when I asked him why he, a non-party man, voted for Communists to represent him on the trade union committee.

"Because if a non-Communist doesn't do what's expected of him there's nothing to be done about it. But if a Communist doesn't do what he's supposed to, he has to answer for it."

PART IV

JEWS, TARTARS, AND OSSETIANS

CHAPTER XXVI

JEWS ON THE LAND

IN APRIL, 1934, SHORTLY after I returned from Plavsk, *Moscow News* sent me to the Crimea to get some stories on Jewish collective farms.

Three people shared my train compartment on the way down: a youth of twenty, a Korean in the uniform of a high Red Army commander, and a civilian carrying a briefcase. By the time the porter brought the kettle of scalding tea, we four travellers had learned one another's destinations and paved the way for more serious conversation. A Soviet train journey in which you do not discover the life story of your companions is no journey at all.

The young man was a sailor from the Leningrad merchant fleet, bound for a month's holiday in a Black Sea Rest Home. He told us about the weekly talks his captain gave on Russian literature.

"Why literature?" I asked.

"Why not? Maybe some member of the crew has the makings of a great writer. This'll bring it out. Gorky was once a stevedore."

He was attending classes on shipboard each night, studying to become a captain himself.

The Korean was a slim man of forty-five, with the yellow skin and slant eyes of his race. He spoke Russian fluently but with some accent. As a boy he had come to Siberia to work as a railroad section-hand. A political exile taught him Russian and Marxism. He had fought all through the Civil War and afterwards remained in the army. Now he was stationed in Moscow, and bound for a month's holiday.

I asked him about the chances of war with Japan.

"It must come. The only question is 'when?' They want our lands east of Lake Baikal. Some day we'll meet. Too bad." He shrugged, accepting as a regrettable fact, that war in the East which most Russians regard as inevitable.

The fourth in our compartment was a Jew, with a beautiful head of greying hair, a sallow complexion and black eyes sunk deep in his head. He was a minor official in the Foreign Trade Commissaria going south for his health.

When he heard I was to visit Jewish farms in the Crimea he leaned forward eagerly:

"Ah, yes. That will be interesting. They've done great things on those farms. My brother's on one of them.

"Most of these Jewish farmers," he explained, "are former petty traders, merchants whose entire stock consisted of a box of herrings or a few yards of cloth. They were called 'people of the air' because they had no roots. They just drifted from place to place.

"I know the kind. I grew up in a little provincial town in the Ukraine where a lot of these settlers come from. My father had one of those little 'two-by-four' stores where he sold sugar and tea to the peasants . . . a miserable, petty existance. . . ."

During the rest of the journey we talked. From him, and from officials in Simferopol, the Crimean capital, I pieced together a background for the Jewish farmers I was later to see taking root on the land.

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The great majority of Jews in old Russia could not live outside "the pale" — what is now White Russia, Western Province and the Ukraine. Within the pale they were confined to the cities and towns, and were, with a few insignificant exceptions, prohibited from settling on the land. In the Ukraine they were not permitted to live in the Province or city of Kharkov, nor in "Holy Kiev".

Once in his youth my train companion broke the law

and entered beautiful Kiev. The house he stayed in was searched during the night and he was thrown into jail.

"There I lay for two weeks, till a batch of criminals was collected and all of us were sent by military convoy to my native town."

"What did they do to you?"

"Nothing. Two weeks in a Tsarist jail was enough. My only crime was being in Kiev without permission. If it had taken six months to gather up enough criminals to send a convoy to my town, I'd have lain there six months."

A few Jews in old Russia were permitted to live "beyond the pale"—University graduates, midwives, and rich merchants who were in the highest tax brackets. But Universities and high schools were closed to all but a small percentage and it was not easy to become rich. Most Jews stayed in the small towns allotted to them. None could get jobs as government clerks; none were allowed to work on the railroads. From 1882 on none could own land.

They did what was left — became traders and artisans. Of the six million Russian Jews at the time of the revolution, about 40 per cent were traders, petty traders for the most part, "people of the air". Another 30–40 per cent were artisans — dyers, shoemakers, tailors, carpenters. The rest earned their living as doctors, religious teachers, clerks, and so on.

The revolution opened up Russia to them. No more segregation, no more pogroms, no more exclusion from schools. They were free.

But, freeing them, the revolution created new problems for many. In the early days after 1917 the government took over all trade, thus figuratively knocking the ground out from under hundreds of thousands of Jews. Even artisans could not follow their trades because with industry in ruins, there was no cloth or leather or lumber with which to work. There was little industry to absorb them and much unemployment till the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan in 1929.

The more venturesome prospered during the period of NEP (New Economic Policy, 1921–28 inclusive) when private trade was encouraged. But many thousands, less able to adjust themselves to the new order, were left "people of the air", drifting from one temporary job to the other, lost and hopeless.

To take care of these the government created "Komzet" (Committee for Settling Jews on the Land), an agency under the powerful Council of Nationalities of the Soviet Union which represented and served the widely varying needs of more than 150 national minority groups in the USSR. Komzet chose applicants and transplanted them to farms in the Crimea and later to Birobidjan in eastern Siberia.

In the spring of 1934 there were 25,000 Jews on eighty-six collective farms in the Crimea, all of them brought from small towns in other sections of the country. They farmed close to half a million acres, producing between 18 and 20 per cent of the peninsula's agricultural output. Komzet had spent, since 1925, close to seventeen million roubles equipping the farms. Other organizations, chief among them the American Jewish Joint Agricultural Corporation had loaned the Soviet government an additional ten and a half millions for the farms.

The cost of sinking wells and putting up public buildings, such as schools and stores, was borne outright by the government. Long-term government loans enabled the collectives to buy equipment and the farmers to put up their homes.

Nearly half of the Jewish collectives in 1934 were completely self-sustaining. Komzet's chief aim was to strengthen the rest by putting up more buildings, increasing livestock herds and bringing more settlers to farms with a labour shortage.

To this end 700 families and their household goods and cows and chickens were brought to the Crimea in 1934, transportation free, to "fill out" already-established farms.

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In order to see some of these newly-arrived colonists I went to the Komzet receiving station at Eupatoria on the Black Sea coast.

It was dark, and the cold wind from the steppe mingled with the dampness from the sea, whistling around the two-story building at the edge of the town. I had seen Eupatoria as a health resort, warm and hospitable under a summer sun. Now it was cold and infinitely dreary, with half the buildings closed and the others dark by eight o'clock at night.

Inside the barrack-like building a dim light burned, and the smell of disinfectant drifted out from rooms where newcomers and their goods had been purged of bugs, fleas and disease germs. Upstairs mothers were putting their children to bed; downstairs the Komzet representatives were consulting with some of the new arrivals.

A dozen people sat wearily on long benches, talking in low tones. A middle-aged man, his thin face cupped in long white hands, was hunched forward at a table, looking into space as though seeking in the empty air answers to his questions about the future. A dark-eyed young fellow leaned against a wall with his hands in his pockets and stared gloomily out into the dark.

No one paid much attention to me. But they crowded eagerly around a blond young giant in boots who came in right behind me and breezily announced:

"I'm from a Jewish collective a few miles from here. Thought I'd come down and look over the new crop of settlers."

They pelted him with questions.

"Tell us the honest truth! How are things on the farm? You ought to know."

"Have you got a cow?"

"Does every family get a house to itself?"

"Is the school really conducted in Yiddish?"

"D'you think I could learn to drive a tractor?"

"Is it true they raise hogs?"

The boy took his role seriously. He pushed his cap back on his head.

"It's like this. If you come here determined to build up a good farm by working hard, you can. We did. We came six years ago when there was nothing here but barren steppe. But you ought to see our village now . . . a separate house for every family, a first-class stable, a bathhouse. We built that after last year's harvest.

"Of course everything's not perfect yet. We ought to have a club house. We voted between that and the bath last fall and the bath won. I wanted a club myself. . . ."

He went on telling them of life on the collective farm. A harness-maker of fifty with a hooked nose, scratched his reddish beard thoughtfully as the boy talked, as though wondering how much to believe.

A ruddy-cheeked young fellow with the shoulders of a boxer, too young to have been uprooted by the revolution, wanted to know if they still needed tractor drivers on the farms. His lovely, grey-eyed young wife stood beside him with a baby asleep in her arms, following the conversation eagerly. I guessed that this enthusiastic pair had been accepted as settlers to make up for some of the older, broken individuals who had to be reclaimed before they could be very useful.

Beside them a middle-aged woman folded her arms over sunken breasts and murmured sceptically to her husband that it could not be so good as the boy said. He did not answer, only shrugged disconsolately. I noticed how the blue veins stood out on his hands, matching the veins in his white temples. He caught my eye on him and when the farmer boy left, and his wife went upstairs, he edged toward me.

"She didn't want to come." He jerked his head toward the ceiling.

"Why not?"

"She wanted to stay in Reshitilovka—said her mother and her father were buried there and her children were

born there. She says she won't know how to be a farm woman."

"It'll probably be pretty hard at first."

"It's been hard for a long time. We're used to it." He spilled his troubles out at my feet. "I had a fine big store before the revolution. But the Bolsheviks took it away. Since then we've had nothing but trouble. What could I do? Take three children and go hunt for work in the city? And besides, my wife wouldn't budge. She'd always say: 'Maybe another revolution will come and we'll get back our store.'"

"Seems unlikely."

"That's what I told her. 'What's gone is gone!' I said."

"Did she become reconciled?"

"Not much. She'd always had things easy before. But one of the children got sick and the doctors said we should live in the country and have lots of milk. He's the only son and for him she'll do anything. That's why we came."

"How do you feel about it?"

"Oh, I'm glad." His voice rose, showing a glimmer of hopefulness. "What kind of a life is it to be thrown from one miserable job to another as I've been the last years. I don't know anything about farming but I'll learn. Maybe it'll be better here."

He nodded good night and shuffled upstairs. I thought, as I watched him go, that if the farm could rehabilitate this broken creature it would be a miracle indeed. Clearly life had knocked most of the confidence out of him.

Next morning I rode out with his family and a number of others to the Goropashnik Collective Farm, seven miles from Eupatoria. Goropashnik was two and a half years old and still feeling its growing pains. I had chosen it purposely because I wanted to see the difficulties of an individualistic, town-bred people adjusting itself to collective farm life.

The steppe in this part of the Crimea is so flat that the horizon seems to mark the dropping-off place at the edge of the world.

We passed Tartar and Russian and German villages, each easily distinguished by our Russian chauffeur.

"You can always tell a German village from a Russian one—the houses are bigger, with neat gardens and fences. The whole village looks better kept. And you can tell a Tartar village miles away by the minaret on its mosque, and a Jewish one by its silo. The Jewish farms always get silos. They start out with everything the others work up to." (Silos were a modern contrivance few of the older farms as yet had.)

When I repeated the chauffeur's observation to the head of Komzet he explained that in order to prevent the development of ill-feeling originating in envy, Komzet spent a considerable amount of money each year providing electricity, digging wells, building silos and in other ways helping German, Russian and Tartar farms in the neighbourhood of newly established Jewish ones.

"We can't have new racial animosities developing while the old ones die. We find that a good friendly feeling has developed in which neighbours help Jews to become accustomed to the land."

From a distance, Goropashnik Farm was a beautiful sight—a cluster of rose-coloured sandstone houses upon a flat green earth, with the glint of the Black Sea beyond. Upon arriving we discovered it had not only a silo, but electricity, brought from a health resort three miles away. It had a good assortment of farm implements and a fine herd of young oxen. It had 4,000 acres of good land and an agronomist to teach the inexperienced farmers how to work it.

But its troubles were many and I did not have to go far to find them.

I left the new arrivals and strolled out alone to the garden where a brigade of women was seated near the

seed beds, sorting onions under the direction of a big Russian gardener. As soon as they discovered I was an American they fluttered toward me, excited as a flock of chickens about a newcomer to the roost.

"I have an uncle in New York. Will you tell him to send me some money?"

"Will you look for my sister in Cleveland? Her husband is rich. She ought to send me a Torgsin order." (Torgsin was the store in which one could purchase with foreign currency. It has since been closed.)

"Do you know my cousin? His name is Schwartz and he lives on 78th Street in New York."

The first woman spoke half in fun, after she had made the inevitable request: "Tell me about America." But others took it up seriously. Two women ran home to get addresses.

I went to another part of the farm. On the fields there was new grain coming up. Two seeders stood idle for want of repair. A youth worked at one of them, trying ineffectually to adjust it with a pair of pliers in lieu of the wrench he needed. The third seeder was operated by a sunburned bearded man who looked at the heavens with a knowing eye and urged the others to hurry so they could do the work of the broken-down seeders as well as their own.

The Russian agronomist told me that Goropashnik had been short of seed and even with additional grain supplied by Komzet, could not plant all the land called for in the local sowing plan.

Komzet representative everything that was wrong with Goropashnik.

"It's the chairman. He appoints brigade leaders who're no good."

"We need a special person to keep the machines repaired."

"How can you expect us to finish the sowing when some people don't get to the fields till 9.30?"

"I won't work any longer with Hirsh! I'd sooner leave the farm!"

The most capable person in the room seemed to be a large, ruddy-cheeked woman, blue-eyed and handsome as she was able. She threaded her way swiftly through the tangle of discussion and moved for action. She prodded the slight, freckled young president and brought the meeting to an end.

I went home with her and we talked while she milked the cow and peeled potatoes for the evening meal. Rather she did the talking. She was so impatient at the stupidities that kept Goropashnik back that she needed no encouragement from me. She was forty years old and till four years before had lived on the earnings of her husband. He had been a trader and then an artisan in Kherson.

"But I like to see plants grow and I'm not afraid of work," she said. "We joined a collective near Kherson at first. Then, two and a half years ago, we came over here with thirty other families from our collective." Three other such distinct groups came and it was this which started the trouble.

"Each bunch thinks it's got to run things. They go whispering around like kids playing a game, trying to get their own friends elected to the farm board. And none of the poor fools will work together after they are elected. Such nonsense!" She pushed her kerchief off her forehead impatiently. Except that her face was not weather-beaten from many years of farming, she looked very much like some of the strong-minded Russian peasant women I had met.

"They elected a weak president and a good-for-nothing farm board that has just about run the farm into a hole.

"And here's another thing. Did you notice how our houses are built—three apartments to a building with all the doors at the front? Well, I suppose the architect had a good time designing these houses. But I have to walk clear around the end of the building to reach my cow-shed, and my chicken yard.

"My two neighbours have their sheds ten steps from the door. You can't blame us women in the middle apartments for not liking it. After a hard day in the fields who wants to hike out to the cow-shed? It's silly little things like this that make the women quarrelsome."

Her husband came home and we sat down to eat with their three children. He was the black-bearded man whom I had seen operating the seeder as though he knew what he was about. He said little, only nodded agreement now and then with his more aggressive wife.

"Another thing that causes trouble is the people who get money from America," she went on after we had taken the edge off our hunger. "They live well whether they work or not. Of course the rest don't like it. We go out to work no matter what the weather is. But they go when they feel like it. Usually that's just often enough for them to be 'technically' members of the collective farm. They don't contribute much but they live better than the rest of us."

So it was to keep up with these Joneses, that those chattering women had accosted me in the garden. This one was apparently made of stronger stuff. While she silently broke off some pieces of dry bread and dropped them into her soup, her husband said loyally:

"She's got relatives in America too. But she won't beg. During the 1921 famine they sent her a package of old clothes and she mailed it right back."

"We'll make our own way," concluded the wife briefly. "All we've got to do is quit wrangling and get to work."

So

CHAPTER XXVII

"ARE JEWS BETTER OFF IN GERMANY —WITH SYNAGOGUES?"

WE LEFT GOROPASHNIK to its troubles and went to Collective Farm Smidovich, named after the head of the Council of Nationalities, a Russian who had been most active in organizing the Jewish farms.

Smidovich was thirty-five miles from the railroad, over a naked steppe where the wind blew unobstructed all the way from Asia, blinding one with its bitter cold. My photographer and I huddled on the floor of the open Ford with our faces buried in our arms while the driver, accustomed to the "nord'uster", hung on to the wheel to keep the car on the road.

Thawing out in the Smidovich farm office, I observed that Muscovites thought the Crimea was balmy and warm in April. The farmers laughed. This was no wind. I ought to feel it in January. They lost two men in it the first winter here.

They had gone to the well for water. It was only a few hundred yards from their doors, but the wind blew them out of their way. Blinded by driving snow, they wandered into the steppe and froze to death.

Seven years afterward the story could be told without emotion. But that first bitter winter fear had haunted the little village lost on the lonesome plain. A third of the settlers deserted. But the hardiest stayed and worked together as the Goropashnik settlers had never done under easier circumstances. They called the farm "Smidovich", but the village was rightly named "Sotsdorf", Yiddish for "Socialist Village".

I learned of the early difficulties from Shor, wiry, sunburned brigade leader.

"We lived in dug-outs while we built our homes. The building did not go so fast, either. It's thirty-five miles to the railroad and we didn't always have horses to haul the lumber. The nearest place to buy flour was Eupatoria, also thirty-five miles.

"It was hard going. The thing that finally made me want to stick was the 1928 harvest. We sowed and there was no rain. We reaped and still there had been no rain. In the Ukraine where I come from, no rain means no crop."[1]

They took me proudly around their village, two rows of warm-hued sandstone houses flanking a wide main street. There was a well-built schoolhouse, where children were taught in the Yiddish language. Russian was studied as a subject. Children from villages far out on the steppe lived during the week in a two-storey dormitory next to the school.

The co-operative store was full of goods. When I observed that, in the spring of 1934, this was unusual, the answer was:

"Why not? We've got a good manager. He ran a store of his own in Kherson. A good man can do a lot even with a commodity shortage."

How well I knew that. A week before I had gone to four stores in Moscow looking for a soap-dish and found none. But in the fifth there were soap-dishes galore at a very low price. And so with many things. A country that was building machines made few soap-dishes and only alert store managers could stock them. In the Sotsdorf drug-store, thirty-five miles from a railroad, I bought some three-inch bandage which I had not found in half a dozen Moscow stores.

Sotsdorf's real pride was not its stores but its red brick hospital. As we approached it, Shor called my attention to young saplings, swaying with the wind in the little park

[1] Dry farming methods employed in western United States, are in wide usage here.

surrounding the building. The rest of the village was still bare of trees.

"Our doctor can do everything," Shor laughed, "even make trees stick to the ground in this wind.

"We used to travel six miles to a hospital. The road was so rough women gave birth to their children before they reached it. Now we have this!"

The twelve-bed hospital served the whole district of thirty-six collective farms. I found but one patient, a woman in bed following an abortion, and one nurse in attendance. The two doctors and two additional nurses were out on "rounds". Every day from one to four members of the hospital staff drove out on inspection trips to the villages, looking for illness before being called to treat it, teaching the peasants rules of hygiene of which many were totally ignorant. Preventive medicine was preferred to cure here.

The physician in charge was a good organizer. He not only got excellent equipment and supplies but he procured the services, each summer, of an excellent surgeon, a professor in the University of Kazan Medical School. The medical school had taken patronage over the village hospital. The surgeon and his family got a vacation in the village for his services, and the natives as good medical assistance as they could get in a city.

That night we attended a meeting at which Sotsdorf collective farmers laid plans for building a clubhouse the following year. Next day we drove to the New Dawn Collective Farm, reputedly the best example in the Crimea of what Jews could do on the land.

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Here was a well-planned village. Each house stood in its own little orchard with chicken coops and cow-shed and a well at the back, half-hidden by vines and flowers. The fragrance of blooming trees and the warm glow of lamps being lighted in the windows gave an air of cosy content-

ment found in the "Own Your Own Home" advertisements in America.

A merry tune played on stringed instruments drifted out to us as we came to the door of one of the houses. Inside we discovered four youths practising for a show. In fresh-washed shirts open at the throat, they looked like city people at home, used to taking baths and changing clothes at the end of a day.

That, and the fact that each played a different instrument, distinguished them from Russian villagers. Russian peasants sang practically anything, but they played, as a rule, only the accordion. Violins and guitars and mandolins were still for city dwellers.

The photographer, too, was struck by the difference between these lads and Russian peasants. Referring to the more cultured appearance of proletarians he tactlessly observed:

"You look like workers, not peasants."

"Well, why shouldn't we?" asked one belligerently. "D'you think we're hicks just 'cause we live in a village?" His comrades tried to smooth over his blunt rejoinder and soon all four filed out, bound for the club-house to rehearse a play.

Round and jolly "Aunt Fanny", mother of two of the boys, bustled about preparing supper of eggs and cheese and delicious home-made bread. This was the week of the Jewish Easter and I asked her about the special Easter cracker that orthodox Jews eat instead of bread. She smiled:

"We don't eat 'matzos' any more. The old customs are dying out. Bread is more nourishing. We all work hard and we need it."

Aunt Fanny, famous in the district for her excellent cooking, was manager of the communal dining-room. Her husband, Uncle Yakov, was a tall dignified man of sixty who looked like a professor and was by training a bookkeeper. He managed the New Dawn vineyard, one of the first to be introduced in this part of the Crimea.

Both of their sons worked in the fields, one daughter conducted the children's nursery and a second was away studying medicine.

The family had come to New Dawn ten years before, when it was nothing but two barracks on a barren steppe.

"It was dark when we got here so we stopped at a nearby village and knocked at a peasant's door to ask for a night's lodging. When the woman heard we were Jews she wouldn't let us in. She thought Jews were devils or something. Finally she let the children come into her cow-shed but we grown-ups froze outside on the wagons.

"It wasn't her fault," explained generous Aunt Fanny. "She was stuffed full of stories about how bad the Jews were. She'd never even seen one. She's really a good soul. Later she came over and showed us how to take care of our calves."

New Dawn had gone through more stages than most Jewish farms. First it had been a commune in which all worked and ate and lived together. As soon as each family felt itself strong enough it broke away and started working a few acres of land alone, as the other farmers in the neighbourhood were doing.

It did not take them long to discover they could accomplish little on a few acres with one horse. In 1930 they quit trying. They put land and horses together into the collective. Since then, said Uncle Yakov, "we've been climbing."

We went next day to the New Dawn field, surrounding the village for several miles. We walked because every horse not being used on the farm was working on the road, as part of New Dawn's annual contribution of men and horses to improve the roadways in the district. Each farm did its share of the work. Roads here were better than I had seen in either Korablino or Plavsk.

We walked through acres of new green wheat, great fields of corn and sorghum. This collective of one-time Jewish traders was raising wheat and sorghum of such high quality

that the government had contracted to buy seed from it for other Crimean farms.

This fact was all the more significant since New Dawn was in the Kurman-Kemelchi district of the Crimea, where more than half the collectives were German, and German farmers were famous for their high-quality crops. The Germans had been in the district for 150 years, settled there by Catherine the Great at the end of the eighteenth century to introduce "culture" into Russia. Thrifty, hard-working, good managers, they became prosperous and for years their farms were models to their neighbours.

They retain today their own language as well as their own work habits. On one German farm I stayed in a home where the eighteen-year-old daughter, Gretchen, in flaxen braids and pinafore, could not answer me when I addressed her in Russian. German was used in the homes exclusively, just as Tartar in the Tartar villages. (In Jewish homes Russian seemed to be as common as the native language, though that may have been out of respect for guests who did not know Yiddish.)

Otto Krause, a German collective farm president, came to New Dawn Farm while I was there, bringing some machines his mechanics had repaired for New Dawn. He was a big burly fellow who must have weighed 200 pounds, blond and red-faced as a postcard-German drinking beer in a Berlin café.

Despite five generations of Russian-born ancestors, he spoke with a German accent when he addressed Kupperman, New Dawn's young farm chairman.

"Say, when do you think you can send your men over with those grape cuttings? We've got a little time now and we thought——"

"Yes, we were just talking about that last night," answered the younger man. "Our vineyardist figured he could take two nights a week for a few weeks to give your fellows instructions in how to take care of the grapes. Then we'd set them out for you and your men could do the rest."

"Fine. When can you start?"

Since the Tartar civilization in the Crimea was destroyed no grapes had been grown here on the steppe, I was told. But Jews had planted vineyards and now Germans came to learn from them.

I mentally chalked up the fact that this was April, 1934. In Germany the Jews were learning again what it was to be persecuted, even as these Jews had formerly been persecuted in Russia. From the point of view of "culture", it looked as though the tables had been turned and Germany must learn from once barbaric Russia.

The German and the Jew laughingly posed for a picture so we might have evidence of their friendliness, and went into the farm office to discuss other matters. I continued around the farm with Chetkov, brother of the man I had met on the train.

Chetkov was lean and brown and eager, with regular features and fine teeth. He showed me the irrigating flumes in the vegetable garden. New Dawn had introduced artificial irrigation in the Crimea. Then he showed me the new separators in the creamery.

Outside the building I met a character I had not yet seen in the Soviet Union—a slender old bearded Jew in black skull cap and shiny mohair coat. In America I had seen his kind caricatured on the stage as a pawnshop broker. Slight and thin, with thoughtful face, he looked like what he was, a student of the Talmud. He had come from his own little town in White Russia to visit his daughter.

"You ought to have a cheese factory so you could make cheese out of all this milk," he said as we came up.

"But we feed the skimmed milk to the hogs, Grandfather," replied Chetkov with a smile.

"Cheese would be better," persisted the old man.

I was curious to know what he thought about the village so I stayed behind alone to talk with him. Grandfather thought the farm was all right except for the absence of a cheese factory.

Not a word about the hogs, not a word about the absence of a synagogue. This was the week of the Jewish Easter holidays. I looked at the black skull cap and prompted him, curious at his seeming unawareness of the difference between this Jewish community and the one he was used to.

"But—no synagogue——?"

"No. No synagogue," he repeated, taking in at a glance the whole village, as though hoping somehow to discover he had overlooked it. Then, philosophically:

"But in Germany they have synagogues. Is it better for Jews there?

"My son-in-law here is a religious man. He wants to keep the Sabbath. Nobody molests him. Since he is a good worker, they say, let him keep the Sabbath.

"Let them live without a synagogue. Nobody bothers a Jew here even if he has no building to pray in. But in Germany look what happens. For us Jews the Soviet Union is the best country in the world!"

He nodded good-day and walked off, his hands behind his back.

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I caught up with my companions as they approached a newly-ploughed field. Last night's musicians were unharnessing their horses for the noon-day meal. They threw themselves on the grass to rest, clear-eyed young huskies. I learned that all four had been away to school in the city.

"Why did you come back?"

"Too crowded," said one. "I had a good job as an electrician but I couldn't find a room."

"I finished my architectural course and got sick," said a second, tapping his chest.

"I couldn't stomach the factory food," said a third who was a draughtsman. "We live better here in the village."

"I'm a Young Communist and was sent back to work here."

He had been brigade leader on a big construction job.

All were a little wistful. They would have liked to go back to the city, they said . . . more doing, in the city.

But young Kupperman, the farm chairman who was only a couple of years older than these boys, said he was contented. He had come up and had been listening to our conversation.

"What could be more interesting than watching and helping this farm develop. I've seen it grow till now we have a club and a nursery for the children and the best irrigation system in the Crimea. Why, even the Germans come to learn from us! The growth of our Soviet Union is mirrored right in this farm."

Somebody mumbled that Kupperman was married and settled, that was why he wanted to stay.

Earlier I had suggested to Chetkov that perhaps Jewish young people with a city heritage behind them would in time be drawn back to the cities. His yellow-flecked eyes grew sharper now as he talked.

"Why do these young people want to go to the city?" He pointed to the boys. "They go there to study because our schools are not advanced enough. Then, when they have learned a trade, they go where they can work at it.

"This boy is an electrician. But we have no electricity in our village. So he wants to go somewhere else where he can practise his trade. That boy is a draughtsman, the other one's sister is studying medicine and she won't come back next year when she finishes because there's no hospital here.

"But the time will come when we'll have our own higher schools. We'll have electricity and we'll need men to draw plans for new buildings. We'll need the service our young people have been trained for.

"And why else do they want the city? Because the city has a theatre, and fine libraries and lectures and movies and good orchestras. But we'll have all that! We've got an amateur theatre now which will become better as time

goes on. We've got a string orchestra now that goes to Simferopol to play in contests. When it gets better people will come here to hear it.

"Our library is small as yet. But we spent 50,000 roubles on agricultural improvements and equipment last year. No reason why in a few years we won't be able to spend it on books and a motion-picture machine for the club-house!"

Chetkov spoke with passion. This farm was his pride and his joy. Out of nothing he and the others had made it prosper. With his own hands he had planted the trees in the village square, dreaming that some day it would shade a theatre. With his own money he had bought a mandolin with which the New Dawn orchestra began. He was sentimental. He was an idealist, a dreamer, but he could work and make his dreams come true.

He looked now over New Dawn's fat green acres.

"Lenin said we must 'destroy the idiocy of village life'. When the village has the advantages of the city then our young folks will be content to stay on the land. We will do what Lenin said."

CHAPTER XXVIII

OUT OF ASIA WITH THE GOLDEN HORDE

OTHER MEN WENT off to fight for the Tsar in 1914. But Amet Devletchaev stayed at home in this little Tartar village on the Crimean steppe and wrote letters for the women whose sons and husbands were in the trenches.

Amet, of the slant eyes, high cheek-bones and delicate aquiline nose of the true Tartar, sat on his haunches then, and with fingers unused to a pen, carefully spelled out the words:

"My son, you will be grieved to know that your father has this day gone to Allah. Now your old mother sits alone in the hut, waiting for you to come home that she may not be lonely."

Amet coughed, the thin wheezing cough of the asthmatic, and looked at the old woman whose veil was wet with tears.

"Cursed be the asthma that kept me here to sit with weeping women," he thought.

Outside, the mullah's voice could be heard calling the half-dozen men who remained in the village of Tash-lishaikh-Eli down to the mosque to pray. Amet shuffled out in his thin hide slippers with the pointed toes.

An exquisitely slim minaret pierced the golden sky at the far end of the village. He walked toward it, soothed by its delicate beauty. Strange how it made him forget the pain of his breathing and the monotonous hopelessness of his life.

He passed the well where women were filling tall brass pitchers and balancing them on slim shoulders. They turned their veiled faces toward the squat clay houses whose thatched roofs even today distinguish the Tartar village on the Crimean steppe.

Amet left his slippers at the sacred portals of the mosque. Inside, as he bowed his head to Allah and mechanically repeated the prayers he had learned as a boy, he thought of the old woman left without a husband or a son to care for her. Who knew whether the son would ever return? Amet had sent many letters and received no reply. Just like the letters, men went and were lost.

It was not right, he thought. It was not right that he alone should be left to support three sisters. One man could not live decently on the few roubles he earned tending the mullah's horse and garden. Not only must he feed the sisters but he must find a husband for each, or be left with them on his hands the rest of his life. And where was he to find even one husband when every able-bodied man had gone to the front? Amet coughed and sighed, bowing his head to Allah. It was not right, perhaps, but so the world was.

That was in 1916 when Amet was twenty-two years old.

I met him in 1934 in the same village, Tashlishaikh-Eli in the north-western section of the Crimean peninsula. A slim Tartar school-teacher, he had stooped shoulders, and asthma had by this time etched fine lines of suffering around his mouth and eyes. He came into the little dirt-floored office of the village collective farm where we were, listened carefully while the photographer and I were introduced to Menseit, the collective farm president.

Menseit shook my hand awkwardly. Seeing Amet, he turned to him with obvious relief. Amet was "literate", he knew how to talk to strangers.

"Here is an American journalist who wants to see our village. I say, we welcome her warmly——"

"Indeed you are welcome," Amet finished for him. "We have never had a visitor from America. See what we are doing and write about it. Let those abroad marvel too at what we have done with our village. We will tell you about the past. We will show you the present."

Amet pushed the embroidered skull-cap back on his shaven head with the protruding ears, smiled an enigmatic smile, and for the moment said nothing more.

But he came over that evening after we had eaten at Menseit's house. We sat in the doorway while night settled over Tashlishaikh-Eli, and Amet told us about the Tartars, oldest of the numerically important races in the Crimea.

"Our people came from the east—out of Asia with Genghis Khan 700 years ago," Amet pointed east to where the minaret was silhouetted against a pale moon. "Later one section broke away from the Golden Horde and came south into the Crimea."

Here they founded an independent khanate. About 1475, aided by the Turks, they drove out the Genoese who had strong colonies on the southern coast.

"Mighty and free they were—and all of them slant-eyed with high cheek-bones—like me," Amet's thin voice took on the sing-song of the professional story-teller. Menseit, with full eyes that hinted of some grandmother who had strayed outside her tribe, pushed the brimless fur hat further back on his handsome head. He turned an expectant face toward Amet, like a child who knows the story but is ever eager to hear it again.

"We settled here on the steppe in the thirteenth century," said Amet. "We forced the Russians to pay tribute to keep our warriors from crossing the borders. We built great irrigation systems which made the whole central steppe fruitful. We raised grapes, tobacco, fruit, silk-worms; we had great herds of cattle. We were a mighty people—a million strong—afraid of no one."

But Russia grew stronger with the centuries. She sent great armies south and in 1783 conquered the Crimea. She made the Tartars serfs, as she had enslaved her own peasants. Catherine the Great, reaching out for European culture, imported Germans and other "advanced" people to cultivate the peninsula, most precious gem in her crown of Empire.

She drove the Tartars out by the thousands and their civilization fell into ruins. Half a million migrated to Turkey. Others fled to the Caucasus. Some went into the mountains along the southern coast of the Crimea.

The year before I had seen Tartars along the Black Sea Coast between Sevastopol and Yalta. They looked more like south Europeans than Asiatics and I was surprised until I learned the reason.

The coast of the Crimean peninsula played an important role in the history of early maritime and colonizing nations which sailed the Mediterranean into the Black Sea. Greek, Genoese, Byzantine, Turkish—armies, traders and settlers left their mark here. Khersonese near Sevastopol, known as "Russian Pompeii", was founded by the Greeks nearly six centuries before Christ; Balaclava, also near Sevastopol, (scene of the famous "Charge of the Light Brigade") dates from the second century B.C. After an eventful past it is today inhabited by Greek fishermen. Many other cities, now dead, flourished on the coast and a few grew up in the interior. Tartar blood, mingled with that of a dozen other peoples, descended from these early colonizers.

"Those Tartars who lived inland in the mountains were much less influenced by the outside world," said Amet. "They kept their old customs. In our village tomorrow you will see four women wearing full red bloomers under their skirts, reaching clear to the ankles. These women came from the mountains only a few years ago. They've given up their veils but the bloomers they wear just as their grandmothers did for centuries. They say it's indecent to go without them.

"But their children are just like ours. One little girl of twelve wore those red bloomers when she arrived, but our girls made fun of her so much she took them off and now she runs around in short skirts and bare legs like the others."

Amet's grandfathers had always lived on the steppe, he said, but he knew little about them.

"My father worked for the mullah," he looked at me uneasily. Connections with the clergy, Mohammedan or otherwise, are not claimed with pride in the Soviet Union.

I hastened to show him I understood. "He had to have some kind of job, of course."

Amet was relieved. "That's how I learned to read. I was always in the garden with my father and when the mullah was in good spirits he'd call me over and give me a lesson."

"Was he often in good spirits?"

"Whenever a rich peasant brought in a big offering of grain."

"What did he do when the poor ones came?"

"Then he'd box my ears," said Amet soberly. "Everyone gave him a third of his grain. But of course the poor peasants didn't raise much and the mullah couldn't get rich on that."

"Was he rich?"

"He lived in the biggest house in the village and had a servant. He was so fat he could hardly climb to the top of the minaret to call us to prayer."

"Why did you give him the grain? Was it for rent?"

Amet did not know. He was not sure who owned the land. "We did the work. But we were ignorant. We'd always paid the mullah, and our fathers before us. So we kept on paying."

In 1917 the revolution came. Amet, sitting with feet crossed under him, read in the newspapers that henceforth Russia would belong to the working men and peasants. All men were to participate in the government and share the land. Even women would learn to rule the state. No longer would he slave in order to feed three veiled sisters who sat at home doing nothing.

"Men came home from the war and each of us got a piece of land. Even the women were given land. Before, they were not counted. I got ten acres. But I didn't have a horse."

"I didn't have a plough," put in Menseit, quietly listening.

So Amet and Menseit began to plough and plant their land together with Amet's plough and Menseit's horse. When their friend Engalichev returned home from the front with his left arm paralyzed, he put in his good plough and the three worked together. It was a primitive kind of collective in which all the land was worked together but each got only what grew on his own section.

"Engalichev and I couldn't work very well," said Amet. "Still, it would have been better if we hadn't had to give the mullah so much."

"What! You gave him grain even after the revolution?"

Amet nodded, shamefaced. "We were a backward people. We gave him a third of the crop just as we had before. Only when the mullah went away did we stop." The clever mullah, guessing what future awaited priests, had a village boy drive him to the railroad station one day, boarded a train and was never heard from again.

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When the Soviets succeeded in pushing their native and foreign enemies out of the Crimean peninsula into the Black Sea, they turned their attention to better things. Amet was visited in the fields one day by a man from the Department of Education.

"What can your village do to establish a school for the children? We will give you books and maps, and pay a teacher's salary. Is there anyone here who can teach? We have no teachers who know your language."

It was a subject dear to Amet's heart. For months he had been talking with his friends. He had even tried to teach some of the older boys in his home at night, but it was too hard after a day in the fields.

"We'll clean out the mullah's house and use it for a school," Amet told the Russian excitedly. "We'll make benches and keep the place heated in winter." Amet went to call a meeting of the villagers.

To

Amet became the school-teacher in the mullah's house and all the boys and girls were enrolled. At first many mothers refused to send their girls, but Amet set the example by enrolling his own daughter and other parents were shamed into doing likewise. Amet himself studied harder than the children because he had to learn geography, arithmetic and political theory before he could teach them.

When one of the village boys returned from the Red Army with a good grade school education acquired there, he and Amet instituted night classes for the "liquidation of illiteracy" among adults. They did so well that in 1934 well over three-quarters of Tashlishaikh-Eli's population of 178 was literate, and all who were not were studying. Ninety per cent of the village could not read in 1917.

The school was conducted in the Tartar language but all the children and many of the adults studied Russian as well. With a Latin alphabet everyone could learn to read and write, Amet explained. Before, with the Arabic script, learning was only for scholars.

Gaining fame as a "liquidator of illiteracy", Amet was sent for five months to a special training school for teachers. And each summer since 1930 he had gone to Simferopol, fifty miles away, for a two-months' course of study. That was the extent of his formal education.

"When more of our young Tartars have become teachers and I won't be needed so much, I'll be sent to the University on a government scholarship. Twenty boys and girls from our village alone are studying in the pedagogical schools. Soon I'll be able to go."

Amet had finished his story. But Menseit leaned forward, tapped him on the knee, and murmured in their own language. Amet had forgotten something. He began again.

"Our Tartar newspaper in Simferopol needed village correspondents. It was hard to write something original. I wasn't used to that. But I sent an item about the school. They didn't print it but they corrected it for me and asked me to send something else. The second story was about the

school for adults. They printed it with my name on it. I'll show it to you tomorrow." He strove to be modestly matter-of-fact but I could see how pleased he was.

"Then I wrote about the tractor, and they sent a photographer to take a picture. You should have seen our women run away. The Koran prohibited picture-taking. But plenty of men got into the picture." Amet laughed, with the nearest approach to merriment I had yet seen in his sober, sick eyes.

"Recently I've been writing poetry—about our village, and a little about the past. They tell me it's good. Here's a copy of one poem that was translated. It appeared in the *Pravda* in Moscow." He reached his thin hand into his pocket wallet and brought out a clipping.

The poem was a short thing of only eight lines. It told how the mosque where Amet used to pray for a better life was now full of grain for the collective farmers of Tashlishaikh-Eli.

"It's not very good," said forty-year-old Amet, modestly. "But I'll be sent to school and there I'll learn to write better."

CHAPTER XXIX

"WHEN WE WERE HUNGRY WE QUARRELLED"

THE REVOLUTION CAME to Tashlishaikh-Eli in 1926 when the first tractor arrived in the village. Compared with that, the upheaval of 1917 was an event of minor importance.

Amet told me how it was, sitting on Menseit's doorstep in the moonlight.

For months he had been reading in the newspapers about tractors; how much faster they ploughed than oxen, how deep a furrow they turned. One day he called the villagers together in the schoolhouse.

"If we plough deeper, the land will yield more. All of us together could raise enough money to get a tractor. The government will help us with a loan."

The usually silent Menseit spoke, urging the purchase. Engalichev, the Kazan Tartar, who was looked up to because for generations his people had lived in "cultured" Kazan, supported them.

These three were men to follow, men of weight in the village. Nonetheless the rest remained sceptical. Who had seen a tractor? How could one know—perhaps the newspapers only lied. How was it possible to plough without oxen? For two weeks they argued. Finally twelve men pooled their savings, enough for the first payment.

Amet wrote letters, negotiated a government loan, and finally got the promise of a tractor for Tashlishaikh-Eli. Menseit went to Simferopol, fifty miles away, to learn how to operate it. Engalichev, at home, directed the other men in building a special barn for the "new steel horse". At last it came.

"Such excitement there was!" said Amet, recalling that great day. Menseit chuckled gleefully, anticipating the story.

"None of the children came to school. The men left their ploughing in the middle of the furrows. Even the women came out to look. Everybody was gabbling, like a flock of geese." But when Menseit pulled down the throttle and drowned out all their voices, pandemonium broke loose.

"Timid ones jumped aside; braver souls shook their fists and yelled:

"Accursed fools! The smoke that machine spits will ruin your land forever! Never will you get a crop! Even if next year you plough with oxen, your land will not be fruitful. This tractor thing has been sent by the devil to blind you!"

Amet's spouse sobbed. Menseit's pretty wife hid herself from the accusing eyes of other women, ashamed that it was her husband who rode the devil's contrivance.

It was a cold dawn the following day when Menseit brought the lumbering monster to the edge of the field and prepared to plough. Angry peasants, wrath overcoming their fear of the machine, grabbed hold of the plough to try to hold it back. They went sprawling when the machine lurched forward. Menseit chugged triumphantly down the field on his iron charger, turning the soil fully two inches deeper than it had ever been turned before.

The rest of the village averaged twelve bushels to the acre but the tractor users got eighteen and twenty-four.

"After the harvest the others came slinking up, one by one to ask if they could put their money in to join us."

By 1930 every family in Tashlishaikh-Eli had joined the "tractor co-operative". By the time the Soviet authorities began organizing collective farms on a large scale, Tashlishaikh-Eli's collective farm "October" was a going concern.

Amet ended the story simply: "Tomorrow you'll see how good our farm is."

Next day Farm Chairman Menseit took me out to see October's 1,500 acres. Menseit was an unlettered man. When he joined the Communist Party four years before he had been unable to sign his name even in his own language. He spoke Russian with a strong accent. He was a handsome fellow, big and rangy and strong, with amber eyes in a tanned skin and perfect white teeth. The caracul cap perched on the back of his head gave him a jaunty air. He looked like a man who could snap his fingers at the timid and ride off on an instrument of the devil.

We rode out in a light two-wheeled cart behind "Abrek", the beautiful roan stallion that was October's pride.

"The mullah never had a horse like this," said Menseit, giving him his head. Abrek flew down the road till Menseit checked his speed with a loving murmur in Tartar. Only three men in the village could handle the horse.

Abrek had sired the fine young colts I saw in the farm corral. For two consecutive years he had taken first place in his class in the collective farm races in Simferopol.

October Farm's land was green with an even stand of wheat and barley. The farm was raising seed grain under government contract as was the Jewish farm New Dawn, a few miles away. October had completed its sowing in record time and was in line for a prize in the All-Crimean competition conducted by the Central Executive Committee of the Crimean Republic.

In 1933 the yield had been twenty-two bushels of wheat per acre and nearly twenty-seven bushels of barley, good crops considering the recent ignorance of crop rotation, seed selection, use of mineral fertilizer, and everything else pertaining to scientific agriculture.

Each family had its own garden, chickens and cow; and each family was, that year, contributing a calf to start a collectively-owned dairy herd.

"Some of us are going to have hogs next year," Menseit

smiled. "The Koran forbids eating hog meat, and the women still object. But most of us men have eaten it away from home."

"Do you like it?"

"Sure. But what's more important, hogs multiply and grow lots faster than cattle. They're very profitable. And our country needs meat. We'll win the women over."

It was significant that in Tashlishaikh-Eli, where only a few years before women had worn veils, the men now considered it important to win their approval before introducing hogs into the barnyards.

Four new houses were built in Tashlishaikh-Eli after the 1933 harvest. In the dozen odd Russian villages I had visited since that banner crop was reaped, I had not seen one new dwelling.

Menseit's new house of whitewashed clay stood opposite the schoolhouse, in a garden of vegetables and flowers, a most attractive dwelling. For three years he had been buying lumber, but only after the 1933 harvest did he have enough grain to hire carpenters.

Menseit's wife welcomed us with smiles only, for she spoke no Russian. She was slim, young and pretty, with a fair oval face and serene dark eyes with only the suggestion of a slant. She tucked a wisp of long fair hair away from her brow as she opened the door. Three little girls scampered away from behind her full skirts. With difficulty they controlled their giggles, as their mother scolded them softly in Tartar for behaving thus before company.

She was a lovely creature, shy and unobtrusive. She served the meals in silence, watching while her husband ate with his guests, but she did not sit down herself. It was not the custom on such a formal occasion.

There were three rooms to Menseit's house with whitewashed walls and floors of mellow, golden clay. This was renewed every few days to keep them spotless and free from dust. The rooms were light and airy, perfectly clean and very spacious with their high vaulted ceilings spanned by

heavy cross-beams of stained wood. The beams were useful as well as decorative, serving as storage shelves for large urns of grain and honey as well as Menseit's spare boots and bicycle tyres.

After Moscow's crowded quarters this was a most pleasing arrangement. The floor was covered with soft rugs in warm tones and other rugs were draped over the low divan that hugged the wall around two sides of the room. Into this old Tartar atmosphere, Menseit had brought "modern culture", an ugly white iron bedstead, a table and a chair.

Menseit ate with a knife and fork but he squatted to wash his hands with water poured into a basin on the floor. The table was for eating only. When bed-time came my hostess chased her husband, the photographer and the children out of the room, told me with gestures to undress and get into her bed. It was so clean and I was so weary that, except for depriving her of it, I did not mind. When the others trooped in again Menseit offered the photographer six feet of divan and a blanket. Then he lay down on the floor fully dressed with his wife and children beside him, and went quickly to sleep. Apparently no one thought of using either of the two empty rooms in the house.

Menseit's house was one of the most cultured in the village. More backward neighbours next door had no bed, no table, no knives or forks or chairs. Everyone from father to year-old baby slept in one long row across the floor. At meal-time they sat cross-legged on the floor around a big reed tray and dunked their hunks of bread into the common bowl of stew. Oddly enough, though the children were often dirty, the houses were invariably clean.

Down at the other end of Tashlishaikh-Eli was the opposite extreme in culture—Engalichev's household. Engalichev and his wife Khatizhe Sabir came from Kazan, where their forbears had learned city ways. Engalichev, moreover, was a man who read and studied, a "modern" from his youth. Their house had four beds, one for each

member of the family. Khatizhe did not hesitate to sit down at the table with her husband. Her house was furnished like that of a Russian city worker, with tables and chairs, starched white lace curtains, books and a picture of Lenin on the wall. I thought it far less beautiful than Menseit's roomy dwelling, but it was unquestionably more modern.

Khatizhe was a short solid woman of thirty-five with firm red cheeks, and a pugnacious little chin. In her short skirt and jacket she looked much like the pick of young Russian peasant women except that her eyes were slant and her hair a shiny jet black.

All the other women in the village wore long full skirts and walked quietly when men were around, not yet used to their freedom. Tartar women before the Revolution were dependent creatures in every sense. The Russian peasant woman was often beaten by her husband, but she worked with him in the field and frequently had a decisive voice in family councils.

But Tartar women were veiled and silent. They were kept behind closed doors. They did not work in the fields. They spoke only when spoken to. They were not considered worthy to enter the mosque. Their function was to cook and bear children.

Khatizhe put it well. "Before—like the calf—we just existed. Now as the law is, so we are. Women are people now, just like men."

She was the only woman in the village, however, who had assimilated this important fact. But she did everything, —headed the garden brigade, went to school ten miles away to learn how to organize a children's nursery,—came home to set one up and conduct an extensive educational campaign so the mothers would relinquish their children a few hours a day. She was studying a first-aid manual when I came to her house for a glass of tea at her invitation. Even inviting me to tea was a sign of her independence. No other woman in the village displayed so much initiative.

Most surprising of all, Khatizhe was learning to ride her husband's bicycle.

"I can see he enjoys it," she said. "Why shouldn't I enjoy it too?"

Engalichev, who had come in on us, nodded his approval. He was proud of his wife.

"When I was a girl," she went on, "I could do none of these things. I wore a veil. In 1918 my parents married me to a man I had never met."

"But I had seen her," put in Engalichev. "I used to watch her when she went walking with her mother. I couldn't see her face but she walked proudly, with her head up. That's why I liked her."

He told his parents he wanted this girl and the match was arranged. As soon as he got his bride home, the young husband told her to put aside her veil for good. Poor Khatizhe was in a dilemma. A wife must always obey her husband, of course, but no decent woman would bare her face in public. She ran home to mother for counsel. Mother was troubled. But she knew one rule for wives:

"He is your husband. You must do what he says."

So Khatizhe laid aside the veil, feeling very brazen, "almost naked", as she ventured out into the streets.

Engalichev read Lenin, and Lenin said that men should raise the cultural level of their wives. So he began to teach her to read and write, her own language and then Russian. He taught her arithmetic. He took her to the theatre. No Tartar woman of her acquaintance had even been inside one.

"Soon other women wanted to go and there was lots of propaganda for women to remove their veils. They began to study, to read the newspapers.

"When I was a girl my parents wouldn't let me study. Women sat at home with their children. They knew nothing except the neighbour women's gossip. They never took a newspaper into their hands. If they had they couldn't have read it.

"But now—times have changed! There's an old woman in our village whose daughter was sent to Simferopol to study for two years on a government scholarship. Do you think her mother objects? She's as glad as if the girl was getting married.

"Come to the schoolhouse to-night. We're having a party and you'll see how much better the life of the young people is now than when I was a girl."

She ended wistfully: "I was born too early. My girlhood was wasted."

A girl of seventeen had come to Tashlishaikh-Eli from a neighbouring village to visit. It was the custom on such occasions for the young folks, and as many of the elders as wished, to gather in the schoolhouse for an evening of dancing and singing. The party was well under way when I arrived, but such a sober, dignified, quiet party it was that it seemed anything but "natural" to me, as Kkatizhe had promised.

A dozen boys and girls were dancing in a ring in the middle of the floor, accompanying the quick, small movements of the feet with wide sweeps of the arms and graceful swaying of the upper body. Every few minutes the partners would change and the dance be repeated again.

The only musical accompaniment was the high lonesome wail of a Tartar song, sung by the dancers themselves and by one or two of the more lively parents on the sidelines. The boys and girls were so unsmilingly sober that the whole performance seemed more like a funeral ceremony than a dance.

Khatizhe came up and asked me how I liked it.

"It's too solemn," I confessed. "I thought they'd be merry and noisy like Russians at a party."

"Well, there's a reason. This dance was done centuries ago by Tartar maidens who wore veils. They had to be dignified and demure and shy. And the boys never danced with the girls. They're not yet used to 'mixed' parties."

"But why no music?"

"Oh—that is our shame," she said. Amet, standing beside her, nodded confirmation. No one in the village could play a musical instrument.

"What can we do? Some day a new teacher will come and will teach music to our children. I can't. In the meantime we make our own music."

Amet, the guardian of Tashlishaikh-Eli's culture, stepped out and raised his thin, sick voice to sing. A few parents who not long before would have been horrified at the mere suggestion that their boys and girls should sit in the same room together, began to sing with him. With nods and smiles they urged their children to dance.

When the dance finished a slant-eyed boy of 15 with a face round as the moon, came up to me. His white teeth gleamed for a moment in his dark face.

"Sing us an Italian song," he said abruptly. Then he stepped back, abashed by his own temerity. Behind him his friends smiled shyly, encouragingly at me.

Amet explained. "He knows you're a foreigner, but what kind he does not know. No matter. Sing them a song," he urged.

It was nearly two years since I had left America. And the high wail of the Tartar singing had driven all thought of American songs out of my head. But to refuse would have been ungracious. I searched my memory and from somewhere buried deep I resurrected "Old Black Joe" and sang it.

They clapped politely when I finished.

"It's a sad song," said the boy, thanking me. "What does it say?"

I had known the song since childhood and never thought about its sadness. But as I translated the words into Russian and waited for Amet to translate into Tartar, I realized how infinitely sad were the words and the melody.

"But your songs are also sad," I told Amet when the young people resumed their dancing and began again to sing some high wailing Oriental melody.

"Yes," he agreed. "We Tartars were exploited like your Negroes. We had plenty of reason to be sad. Perhaps that is why the music is sad.

"The music is of the past. But the words are of the present. They are not sad."

"What does this song say?"

Amet translated for me:

"It tells of men who slaved in order to bring grain to the mullah's bursting bins.

"It tells of young people learning to operate tractors and run nurseries for the children. It tells of theatres.

"It tells how, before, we quarrelled because we were hungry, and how, today, we live at peace with each other because we are at peace with the world we live in.

"It tells of everything that is new and good in our world and how we are changing the old."

CHAPTER XXX

"HOTBED OF INTERNATIONAL HATES"

"The Russians clashed twice with our mountain peoples;[1] the first time there was no single prince ruling us, but the khans were at the peak of their power, the strength was in their hands. So they conquered the Russians, levied tributes upon them; took away their beautiful maidens and young men; this way they suppressed them.

"Then the Russian prince asked a sorceress living in the lower part of the village:

"'How can I break the power of the khans? They make life impossible for us.'

"And she said:

"'Until out of the Russians from the blood of the khans there comes an heir, and until he is old enough to fight, you will find no remedy against them. For the present, do them no harm but become friendly with them. Perhaps among your own kin an heir will appear of their blood.'

"The Russian prince made an effort and became friendly with the khans. One day he invited the chief khan to his home. He served him rich food and drink. For a week he entertained the khan and then persuaded him to stay three days longer.

"Each night, after they had eaten their fill, the prince would disappear, leaving his wife near the chief khan. He had ordered her, by some means or other, to entice the khan to her bed. But not for anything would the khan agree.

"Much time passed over them in the home of the Russian prince. Whenever the khan would begin to say that it was time for him to go, the prince would prepare great quantities of food and gather together his subjects. The people, great and humble, would circle around like wolves.

"One night, having eaten and drunk his fill, the khan could control himself no longer and yielded to the temptation offered by the prince's wife. From this she became pregnant and bore a son.

"When the boy grew to manhood he began to harry the khans, there was a great battle and he conquered them. From that day the Russian prince became the ruler over many nations.

"Just now, as it happens, for the second time the Russian power has clashed with our Caucasus mountain people. When it happens to us for the third time, then will be the end of the world."

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[1] Re-translated from the Russian—an Ossetian legend of how the Russians conquered the Caucasus, as told by an old Ossetian bard, Kertibi Kertibiti (1834-1914).

THE CITY EDITOR of the *Moscow News* came over to my desk.

"There's a wild-eyed Ossetian downstairs," he began. ". . . wears a big fur hat and a two-foot knife in his belt. Looks like he belongs in one of the Tsar's Circassian 'Savage Divisions'.

"But he writes poetry, and a couple of years ago he quit herding sheep in the back passes of the Caucasus to learn the newspaper game in Moscow. I want a story on him. He's proud, touchy—like all those wild devils from the Caucasus. Be careful not to offend him."

That was my introduction to Mikha.

We used to see him occasionally after that. He was about 22 years old, slim and short, but with his long dark sideburns, amazingly quick black eyes and swaggering walk that made his full-skirted military coat swing gracefully at his heels, he was a striking figure. He laughed gleefully at anything we Americans did which seemed strange to him. And for us, too polite to laugh, he was a constant source of amazement and curiosity.

We were more than usually taken aback, however, when he turned up one day with a charming young girl and with unembarrassed delight invited us to go along on their honeymoon. ("Us" was my husband, our American friend Anne, and I.)

"I'm taking her to the Kudaro Valley high up in the Caucasus to meet my people," he told us. "No foreigners have ever been there. You'll see how my people live. There'll be a new language, new customs. And such mountains! Your America has nothing like them. How about it?"

Naive, lovable, impetuous Mikha was as excited as a small boy with a new toy. He had not been home for three years. Now he would return, the local boy who had made good—a full-fledged newspaperman with a city bride and three "foreigners from across the sea" to display to his admiring mountaineers.

He brought over maps and we discussed plans. By the middle of June, when the *Peasant Gazette* sent him south to cover the harvest, we had agreed to meet him in the Hotel Europa in Ordjonikidze[1] on the first of August.

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Our first view of the Caucasus we got at dawn from the train window—a great chain of snowy peaks jutting into the sky high above a flat steppe. Magnificent Kazbek and Elbrus, made famous by Russian poets, towered above the clouds, dazzling under a brilliant blue sky.

Later when the train began to climb, a new type of men appeared among the loafers at the village stations—Caucasians instead of Russian peasants or Cossacks. Ingush, Chechen, Georgian, Ossetian, and others, they all looked the same to me but they were quite unlike the Russians.

Tall, dark-skinned, with flashing eyes and finer, sharper features than the Russians, they were often handsome and invariably striking. Great drooping white felt hats, 18-inch daggers, and the almost arrogant grace with which they wore the slim-waisted "cherkeska"[2] made them picturesque and romantic.

Ordjonikidze lay at the foot of the high Caucasus Range with the cold green Terek River tumbling through it on a rocky bed. It was a sprawling sunny town with dusty cobbled streets and a wide, tree-shaded boulevard. Automobiles were few, but traffic heavy. Horsemen and carriages clattered over the cobbles, heavy ox-carts piled with watermelons squeaked their way to the market-place, and occasionally big trucks sped through to new plants on the outskirts.

The town had been renamed Ordjonikidze in honour of the late Commissar of Heavy Industry who led the Reds in the fierce fighting by which they finally won it. The old name, Vladikavkaz, meaning "Rule the Caucasus", was

[1] The former Vladikavkaz, northern terminus of the Georgian Military Highway leading over the Caucasus Range from Tiflis.

[2] Caucasian coat, tight-waisted with flare skirt, often with a row of cartridge pockets across each breast.

given in 1784 by Catherine the Great, who planted a fortress there to hold the mountain peoples in submission.

Slightly more than half the town population is Russian —the rest Ossetian, Georgian, Chechen, Ingush, Armenian, and other nationalities, most of them from the mountains.

Ordjonikidze now has the curious distinction of being, at one and the same time, the peaceful capital of Northern Ossetia and Ingushetia[1], whose peoples had for centuries been bitter enemies. Education and the remarkably effective Soviet policy toward national minorities have practically extinguished the embers of old hatreds. Occasionally one meets traces of old prejudices, but they are fast dying out. I was amused by the attitude of an Ossetian collective farm chairman, a few miles from Ordjonikidze. When I admired the farm's fine orchard, he replied:

"Yes, a fine orchard—but we have to guard it day and night."

"Against whom?"

He looked uneasily across the stream that separated his farm from an Ingush collective farm and lowered his voice guiltily:

"Well, they can't overcome their old habits overnight. I hate to say it but the Ingush still steal."

A more cultured Ossetian laughed when I told him this story.

"What that Ossetian would have said a few years ago was 'The Ingush are a pack of dirty, lying, filthy, no-good thieves'. That's what we were taught for generations. But he doesn't quite believe it any more. And he wouldn't dare say it if he did.

"The Soviet power, that has given him the land and freedom, demands he live well with his neighbours and not malign them."

. . . . .

Ten days' stay in Ordjonikidze gave us time to learn something about the national hates of the Caucasus, where

[1] Two autonomous divisions of the North Caucasus.

forty-five nationalities and half a dozen religions are jammed together in closer proximity than anywhere else in the world.

The history of the Caucasus is one long story of invasions, wars, and conquest. Alexander the Great conquered the Caucasus, Pompey's legions, and later those of Justinian, fought at Darjal Pass, famed "gateway to the Caucasus". Arabs, Khazars, the Turko-Mongol hordes, Persians, Byzantine Greeks and many others warred through the mountain passes, pillaging and massacring the people who preceded them. Tiflis was burned or razed twenty-nine times during the 1,500 years it was Georgia's capital.

Each conqueror pushed the vanquished further up into the steep mountain valleys where each successive wave of the vanquished fought the others and the steep hills for a livelihood. Fortress towers still standing all through the Caucasus bear witness to the precariousness of mountain life.

Existence was hardly less secure after annexation by Russia. Following out their imperialist policy of "Divide and Conquer", the Tsars suppressed the native peoples, stirring up hatred among them so as to hold them down. Cossacks were planted on the fertile plains just north of the range. In exchange for land and privileges these hardy Russians whipped the natives into submission and made sure they never directed their fighting against the "Tsar Little Father".

The state church aided the "dividing" process, we were told, by sending missionaries into Mohammedan regions to proselytize in alternate villages. Thus one hamlet would be left Mohammedan while the adjoining one learned to hate the Moslems. As a result, religion was added to the forces which kept the Caucasian people disunited and weak.

During the Civil War Ordjonikidze was the scene of bitter fighting between Christian Ossetians and Mohammedan Ingush. On one occasion the Ingush blockaded the Ossetian quarter, intending to starve out their old enemies.

Driven to desperation, the Ossetians formed flying wedges to cut their way through the besiegers. Each man hooked one hand through the belt of the man at his left, and held his dagger in the other. Thus locked into compact lines, they rushed out slashing to right and left, and cut their way through the Ingush lines. Many were slashed to pieces but the blockade was broken.

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The Ossetians are generally thought to be descendants of the Alans, a fair-haired, blue-eyed race which peopled the north coast of the Black Sea at the beginning of the Christian era. Relics found in graves indicate that they lived at one time in what is now the Ukraine. It is considered significant that the rivers Don, Dneiper, and Dneister all have the same root—"don"—the Ossetian word for water.

These forerunners of the Ossetians fought against the Tartar hordes that swarmed over Russia in the thirteenth century and probably were pushed into the mountains by the conquerors. According to Ossetian legend, their forebears were such fine fighters that whole detachments, when finally captured, were sent as gifts to eastern princes. An Ordjonikidze acquaintance told us that his father, while travelling in the far east, came across villages of fair-haired men who spoke a language similar to his and whom he took to be descendants of these early warrior detachments.

Fighting has always been a strong point of the Ossetians. They distinguished themselves in the Tsarist army long before the World War and when the Civil War began they joined the Bolsheviks in great numbers.

Even in remote villages high in the mountains we found a surprisingly high proportion of former Red Partisans among the men we met. Inquiring into this anomaly—that remote mountain valleys, with illiterate populations and no industrial proletariat, should contribute so many sons to the Revolution—we found the explanation simple.

The Ossetians hated the Georgian princes who, backed by the Tsar, had taxed and oppressed them. When these Georgians sided with the White Army, the Ossetians promptly joined the Reds.

It mattered not that many of them had never heard of Marx or Engels. As one of them explained to us: "You don't need to read books to know when you're being oppressed."

Fighting was bitter here. The Whites burned numerous Ossetian villages in the dead of winter. Women and children and old men too feeble to fight fled across the high passes of the Caucasus, losing part of their number in blizzards. Many of these refugees still live in the village of Nogir, near Ordjonikidze, where they were given fertile valley lands by the government.

Like other Caucasian mountaineers, the Ossetians formerly kept in fighting trim by engaging in "blood feuds".

A frequent cause of feuds was the custom of giving "kalim" (payment) for a bride. A girl was property like a horse or an ox, so the father demanded payment when he relinquished her labour power to someone else. A poor man, unwilling to work ten or fifteen years to earn the price of a wife, had in practice two options: to steal the girl, or to turn bandit and rob some traveller to get the money. Either method was likely to start a feud.

Buying and selling of brides is a crime against the Soviet law. So, of course, is murder—even on behalf of family honour. But the valleys of the Caucasus are high and remote, and the arm of the law cannot reach everywhere at once.

An Ossetian friend told us of seeing an encounter of "blood-enemies" in 1930. He was travelling through the mountains with three other Ossetians, a man of fifty with his two grown sons. Suddenly they met on the narrow trail two members of a family which for several generations had been enemies of the family to which his companions belonged.

Like the jousts of armoured knights of old, the blood feud has its rules of procedure. A man is never attacked from ambush nor while a guest in one's home. If either enemy is accompanied by a woman they must not fight but if accompanied by a man they not only fight but the companion fights too.

Our friend, knowing the custom of the country, dismounted and pulled out his revolver. The eldest of his companions pushed him aside.

"They have only cold steel. You have a gun. Stand back. We fight with our kinzhals."[1]

Whereupon the three flung themselves upon their two enemies. Our friend, who had fought all through the Civil War, described this fray as "the bloodiest thing I ever saw". They thrust and slashed till the dust of the trail was red, stopping only when one man was dead and two severely wounded.

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How hard it has been to break the mountaineers of their free lawless ways is illustrated by this story, told us by Khokhov, an Ossetian artist.

Khokhov studied painting and attended the University in St. Petersburg before the revolution, a rare privilege for a member of a national minority. When we met him he was Ossetia's foremost artist, and one of its most cultured men. He received a government salary for painting a stipulated number of pictures each year, and spent his leisure time in the mountains studying customs and culture of various native peoples.

During the Civil War he had fought with the Reds and had been a member of the Revolutionary Soviet of Ordjonikidze. One day his chief informed him that a young bandit had entrenched himself on a ledge overlooking a certain pass and was robbing and terrorizing everyone who came

[1] Eighteen-inch, two-edged daggers, still commonly carried in the mountains.

by. Further, that since the desperado was Khokhov's own cousin, Khokhov would be expected to reform the youth.

Khokhov rode out to the pass, and as he neared the ledge, heard a strong young voice ordering him to dismount and disarm. He did so and the bandit came down.

"I hadn't seen him for years," related Khokhov. "But I recognized him at once by the rifle he carried and by his trousers, cut from some cloth my own father had brought from the far east. I called him by name and he almost dropped his gun from surprise.

"When I told him who I was, he flushed, ashamed to be robbing his own kinsman."

Khokhov tried to persuade the boy to quit his brigandage.

"If it's fighting you like, join us Reds."

"No," sullenly. "You Reds are making a mess of everything."

The Russian army was still at war on the Polish border. Khokhov proposed that the boy go there and fight the foreign enemy.

"No," he replied proudly, "There I'll have to take orders. Here I listen to no one."

In the end Khokhov gave up in disgust and rode back to Ordjonikidze to report that nothing could be done. Even the boy's father had washed his hands of the incorrigible. Let the law take its course.

The bandit was a fine dancer. Not long after this incident he rode into town one night to dance at a wedding. The militia was on the lookout for him. They surrounded the house, closed in while the other guests left in a panic, and in the fight that followed the youngster was killed.

But the tie of blood and tradition was strong. The boy's elder brother, himself a captain in the militia, forgot he was a Red Partisan and an upholder of law and order, when he learned his brother had been killed. Wildly he turned on the militia-man who had shot the boy, and with one lunge ran his sabre through the militia-man's heart.

He was arrested, convicted, and served his term—not a long one, since the court gave full weight to the extenuating circumstances of mountain tradition. When we heard of him, he was living in Leningrad, unhappy away from his native mountains but ashamed to return home, where, in his own eyes, he had disgraced himself.

Not every one, by far, was ashamed of the old ways.

Khokhov's aunt by marriage who lived with him, for example. Some years after the revolution her husband was killed in a blood feud. His slayer was arrested and convicted, but the widow was not satisfied. She wanted Khokhov to go out and kill some relative of the murderer for revenge.

"But the law is punishing the killer! We've got to quit these barbarous customs sometime and become civilized people!" he remonstrated.

The old dame was adamant. Khokhov could not set foot in his own house for weeks. Every time he entered the old woman spit at him, crying it was a curse and a shame her niece had been married to a woman. She would throw her dress and shawl at him, telling him to put them on and quit masquerading as a man.

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The backwardness of Ossetians and other national minorities was the natural consequence of centuries of poverty, ignorance and oppression. One of the first things the Soviet government did when it assumed power was to declare that all nationalities of Russia were equal and none subservient to the Russians as previously they had been.

Recognizing, however, that in reality they were not equal —that formerly oppressed peoples were both economically and culturally backward, and that until these inequalities were removed the national minorities could not assume their rightful place in a union of equal peoples, the government began to expend great efforts to minimize these inequalities.

Tremendous sums of money have been spent on industrial and agricultural development, education and social improvements among backward peoples in the Soviet Union. In the years just preceding our visit to Ordjonikidze a huge Electrolytic Zinc Plant had been put into operation in the city, drawing upon the various local nationalities for its labour power. Within a few miles of the plant were a large glass works, a couple of starch manufacturing plants, a great electric power plant. Not far away the best Machine Tractor Station I ever saw provided machines and service to newly organized collective farms.[1]

Mountain herdsmen learning to operate modern machinery skipped two centuries in the space of two years and took on, gradually, the habits of modern industrial society. Ingush and Ossetians, handling molten glass or working in the same brigades on the Gizeldon power project, learned that their fellow workers had the same problems and hopes as they had, even if they spoke a different language.

For their children, and themselves in their free hours, schools were established, where they were taught to read and write their own tongue and Russian, in addition. A scientific research institute studied history and customs of Ossetia and recorded its findings in the national language so that all Ossetians could read and grow in their own culture. Universities, newspapers, theatres, hospitals and rest homes were set up to develop and minister to the wants of a people emerging from the dark.

Every one of the Ossetians with whom we talked, told us of these opportunities the Soviet government had given them. Invariably, they would add: "How was it under the Tsar?" and then go on to tell how it was under the Tsar. Khokhov, an educated articulate Ossetian, put it better than most of them:

"We Ossetians had no written language. The few children

[1] I mention only the few "civilizing agents" with which I personally came in contact. There were, of course, very many more.

who managed to get into schools studied only Russian. They learned to be ashamed of their language and people.

"We were tried in the courts by Russian judges who thought it was their function to humiliate and suppress us.

"Now it's just the opposite. We're made to feel—not insignificant but important. We've got our newspapers, libraries, theatres. Our children are taught in our own language. Our own people govern us here and are elected to represent us in Moscow. We are encouraged to develop our own art and music and literature. Russians look with admiration—not contempt—at our native dances."

He summed up Soviet national policy in his own words:

"A people will develop fully only under the greatest freedom of expression in its own medium. That's the opportunity the Soviets have given the formerly oppressed minorities of Russia."

CHAPTER XXXI

INTO THE CAUCASUS

"Oh, he, who worked much, untiring!
Oh, he, who knew much, who worked much! . . .
Oh, he, who in the day of need was a purse full of money;
Who, when the cows calved, was their protector. . . .
He, the broad-shouldered one, slim-waisted, with beautiful carriage, built like a deer! . . .
He, who coursed by night as freely as by day,
Will now course by night, comrade of the clouds!
On a grey horse, shod with grey iron, he will ride. . . .

Oh, how you are to be pitied! How much you toiled in vain!
Your fate leaves Digoria[1] without a protector! . . .
Oh, how you are to be pitied!
You who did not live to see your son married, who did not give your daughter in marriage!
Oh, how you are to be pitied!
That, having aspired to this, you did not achieve it!"

(Ossetian Lament for the Dead.)

ON THE APPOINTED date Mikha arrived at our Ordjonikidze hotel, punctual to the minute. His eyes were blacker and merrier than ever and a gleaming smile lit his lively dark face.

"The harvest is in and my work is over. This afternoon we go out to Nogir village where my wife is, and tomorrow we take the Georgian Military Highway for Tiflis."

He quite fancied himself in the role of guide, interpreter and organizer of our little expedition. Russian young people on vacation frequently travel "in an organized manner" . . . that is, in a group with an elected "elder" to make the arrangements. Mikha was our self-elected "elder" and he entered into his duties with great zest. We relinquished details to him gladly and pressed him for information about himself.

[1] One of the regions of Ossetia.

He had been sent to Ordjonikidze by his paper, the powerful *Peasant Gazette*, to help organize the harvesting campaign in Northern Ossetia. Occasionally he sent a story to Moscow or wrote for the local Ossetian papers, but his main job was to stimulate and organize the Young Communists in the fields for a quick efficient harvest. When drought threatened he had recruited students from Ordjonikidze schools to dig irrigating ditches through the grain fields.

"We dug a hundred kilometers of ditches and then the rain came. Otherwise we'd have dug two or three hundred. See what it means to have collective effort? In your country could you get students from the cities to save the crop?"

This was no hypothetical question with Mikha. Alert, intelligent, quick to learn, he had been made by the revolution and he never stopped singing its praises.

He had been a shepherd lad in a remote Caucasus valley, tending sheep for a rich herdsman, who fed him and gave him three lambs each year as wages.

One day a terrible storm scattered his flock and drove him to a deserted old church for shelter. Poor Mikha was only eleven years old then. His mother had died and he knew no one else in the village would have pity on him if he lost the sheep. So he fell to his knees and prayed aloud to God to stop the rain and send back the lost sheep.

For twenty-four hours the cold rain continued and the sheep did not return. Mikha wept bitterly. Finally, angered by God's failure to respond, he picked up a rock and threw it with such force against a "holy stone" near the church that the stone was shattered.

"Then I was afraid God would punish me. And two days later I did get very sick. But I got well." Bright little Mikha pondered this pleasant surprise and decided finally there was some considerable disparity between the beliefs of his elders and actual fact.

Another time he took some coins from a church coffer but was not struck dead as believers said the thief would be.

"From that day I stopped believing in God!"

Tainted with such doubts Mikha very naturally gravitated toward the Young Communists who found their way up to his little village when a school was opened near it. He joined their organization, started to study, was sent to a Young Communist School in the mountain capital of Southern Ossetia. There he began working on an Ossetian newspaper from which eventually he transferred to the *Peasant Gazette* in Moscow. When we met him he was working on the paper and simultaneously studying journalism, political economy and Marxism in a night university. He was rapidly becoming an educated and, in some respects, a cultured man.

What a difference the revolution had made in Mikha's life we first guessed when we met his brother in Nogir. The brother was a man of forty with a face dulled by ignorance and hardship. As a collective farmer he was learning to accept tractors and agronomists, but he still lived in a dirt-floored hut like those in his native mountain village. He had several children and a wife who hovered in the background like a servant, never opening her mouth except to tell her husband meekly that the cheese-pie she had baked for the guests was ready. She did not, of course, come in to eat it with us.

Mikha, on the other hand, was delighted with his pretty grey-eyed wife, Tanya, and it was obvious that her wishes to him were law. Tanya was a laboratory technician who had worked in the Odessa rest home where Mikha had spent his previous vacation. She was the only child of Ossetians who many years before had migrated to the Ukraine, and she called herself an Ukrainian.

She flushed when she met us, ashamed to be found in a dirt-floored hut. But she was a cheerful girl, enough in love with her mischievous mountain boy Mikha to adjust herself to more than that. Being friendly to three chaperones on one's honeymoon is more than most women could manage, but Tanya did it with fairly good grace through many a difficult situation.

. . . . .

In the bus was an assortment of Russians on a holiday, Georgians taking the shortest route to Tiflis after conducting business in Moscow, and mountaineers of various nationalities bound for little villages along the highway from which they would climb on foot to their homes in the upper valleys.

The clouds lifted as we got up into the pass, disclosing steep green hillsides and blue ranges where shafts of sunlight reached into far deep canyons. Mikha's elation grew with the altitude. He pointed with possessive pride at the mountains and dramatically recited Russian poetry, now and then hugging his bride for emphasis.

Two hours south of Ordjonikidze we entered the narrow Darjal Gorge; strategic gateway famous in history because it many times stopped invaders either from the north or south. Eight centuries ago the Georgian Empress Tamara built a grim fortress here on a high pinnacle of granite and blocked the pass through which northerners had invaded her rich empire. The crumbling walls of the fortress still stand, dark and gloomy under the towering cliffs.

A thousand legends are told of the cruel, powerful, beautiful Tamara who "fair as an angel from heaven, foul as a demon from hell . . ." enticed wayfarers to her bower for a night and in the morning had them thrown into the river below.

The gloom of the pass quieted all but Mikha. Applauded by the Russians, whose love of poetry would excuse almost any nonconformity, he rose and dramatically recited Lermontrov's lines about the famous Empress:

". . . No Shah of golden Persia e'er did kiss
A face so bright, so beautiful, as this;
No houri in the noontide heat did lave
A form so perfect in the fountain's wave,
And lover's hand, since Eden's days, I trow,
Ne'er smoothed the wrinkles from so fair a brow. . . ."

Further, where the canyon widened, flocks grazed a safe distance from the road and an occasional shepherd in a long

black cape was silhouetted against the sky. Mikha pointed out a phallic symbol on a hillside, left from the days when some mountain tribe prayed to it so that the gods would make their cattle and their women fertile.

Kazbek peak was shrouded in clouds when we passed, but fortunately our bus broke down and we had to spend the night in the village at its base. We five slept in a room with three other married couples and a bachelor with a cold. But in the morning we were repaid by a sight of Kazbek, dazzling and beautiful in the rising sun.

Four crumbling fortress towers still stood in Kazbek village, unused except as storage places or hide-outs for the children. We asked an old man who had built the tower behind his squat stone hut.

"My tenth grandfather," he replied, meaning an ancestor ten generations removed.

It was a four-sided tower built of stones, about twenty feet square at the base, narrower at the top, rising to a height of some forty feet. Half-way up one side was a small door. At the approach of danger in earlier days the family climbed through this door, pulled the ladder in after it, and was safe from the enemy. Supplies sufficient to withstand a long siege were kept in the tower ready for emergencies. It is said that the Georgian Military Highway was once lined with such towers, strategically placed so that approach of enemies could be signalled up and down its whole 142-mile length.

Chugging out of Kazbek we passed a Georgian driving a pair of water-buffalo. These are remarkably ugly creatures, mud-coloured, with coarse hide sparsely covered with hair. But they are apparently good draught animals. Throughout the Caucasus, where roads permitted the use of wheeled carts, we met the ugly beasts.

These two were unused to automobiles. They shied suddenly at our approach and overturned the cart of watermelons. Snorting crazily, they galloped up the hillside while the owner sprawled on the ground and cursed a bad cut

on his arm. Our bus stopped and a valiant quartet of Russian Komsomols dashed to the rescue. The two youths ran after the animals, the girls cornered the amazed Georgian and began pouring iodine on his cut. When the wound began to smart from the medicament, the poor mountaineer tore himself away from the girls and ran after his animals.

"Uncultured people!" sniffed one of the girls. "You try to give them a little civilized attention and they bolt!"

"These Georgians never heard of iodine," put in Mikha. "If a little cut was going to hurt him he'd been dead long ago."

A "nationality-conscious" Georgian took offence at this.

"Ekh . . . you . . . Pushkin!" he snarled. "What do you know about it?"

Mikha had his sore spots too—the long black sideburns like the Russian poet Pushkin's. He cherished them as a sign of his admiration for the poet, and partly, I suspect, because they gave his small person considerable distinction. When anyone said "Pushkin" with a slurring intonation, he grew belligerent.

"Who said Pushkin?" he demanded.

"Recite some more poetry, Mikha," put in his bride quickly, pushing her hand into his. So Mikha forgot the insult to his facial decoration, and we rode merrily on to Tiflis.

. . . . .

Tiflis was hot and dusty and crowded with tourists, Soviet and foreign. Mikha and Jack made the rounds of eight hotels while we sat on our baggage in the bus waiting-room. They turned up finally with one windowless room for the five of us on the back balcony of a rooming house with bad plumbing.

With clean clothes under our arms we rattled up the narrow, crooked little streets in a crowded tram-car to a mineral water bath in old Maidan, Asiatic Tiflis. Here we Americans inadvertently insulted Mikha and got another lesson in the problem of dealing with national minorities.

Men and their wives bathe together in Tiflis. I knew this but had forgotten about it. In our casual American manner Anne and I took the first room available, thinking that Tanya would join us and Jack and Mikha take the next one. But Tanya did not follow us and when afterward we sat outside cooling off and the bridal couple emerged and sat sullenly, silently beside us, we realized our blunder.

For all his cockiness, Mikha secretly feared that we Americans looked down upon him because of the "cultural backwardness" of his people. Now he thought Jack and I were demonstrating our superiority by bathing in separate rooms. For some days he never missed an opportunity to scoff at "you cultured Americans!" every time we did anything other than he did. Even the relations between him and his bride became strained and we suspected her of lecturing him in private on the backwardness of Caucasian custom. It was an unpleasant lesson, but we learned to let Mikha take the lead in his own country.

. . . . .

The mountain town of Gori, a few hours by train from Tiflis, has two claims to fame—the remains of a twelfth century fortress, and the fact that it is Joseph Stalin's birthplace. The fortress, perched on a conical mountain from which the whole valley is visible, had belonged at various times to the Turks, the Persians and the Georgians before Russia annexed it in 1801.

From Gori we jolted twenty miles in a delivery truck over impossible roads to Stalinir. Stalinir, the former Tskhinvali, is the administrative centre for 3,000 square miles of the Caucasus' wildest peaks and valleys that make up Southern Ossetia. Mountain people sometimes ride for three days to do their trading on its broad market place.

It was Sunday when we arrived, and the narrow cobbled winding main street was crowded with market-bound horsemen whose saddle-bags bulged with everything from squealing pigs to cordwood. Teams of water buffalo, pulling

crude, homemade wagons, greedily crowded each other out of the ditches that overflowed at both sides of the thoroughfare. Not getting wet enough that way, two or three had folded their legs up under them and lain down in the rivulets, snug and comfortable despite the shouts and kicks of their owners.

It seemed that the whole population of Ossetians and Georgians and mountain Jews had come out into the streets under the sunny sky, talking, laughing and cursing the animals, bargaining over eggs and pottery and cornmeal and horses on the market-place. Here were handsome women with many skirts and shawls and babies; men with daggers at their belts and great long "handle-bar" moustaches and gallant fur turbans; little boys throwing rocks into the river that raced down from the cold blue mountains in the distance.

A friend of Mikha's led us around old Stalinir and then proudly took us to the new uncrowded section of town—"the developing socialist city". Here were schools, several pedagogical institutions, a fine hospital, a training school for medical assistants—all established since the revolution to raise the cultural level of the mountaineers. The town boasted also two Ossetian newspapers which were read in high mountain villages by people who had never even seen a wheeled cart, so remote were they from the valleys of civilization. We were reminded that before the revolution the Ossetians had not even had a written language of their own.[1]

A little apart from the other new buildings was a "House of Culture". Here was a new young theatre with a permanent group of twenty professional actors presenting plays in the native language. A library had been opened in one wing of the spacious building, and a museum in another. Its research department was studying the resources of South

[1] Ossetian was sometimes written or printed with the Georgian and Russian alphabets, but only since acquisition of the Latin alphabet has any extensive publishing been done.

Ossetia. The South Ossetian Scientific Research Institute, quartered here, was attempting to determine the origin of the little-known mountain-Jews who for centuries had been handicraftsmen in Stalinir. They retained their language, their religion, their synagogue, and, to a large extent, their racial purity.

Mikha tried to talk to a white-bearded Jew who was baking bread in his front yard by plastering great flat batches of dough on the outside of a crude oven. When the inside heat had "cooked" it he peeled it off, just as his Georgian neighbours did. The patriarch spoke a jargon of Ossetian which not even Mikha could understand. He called that language Yiddish but it was completely unfamiliar to my slightly tutored ear.

We hunted out the rabbi's house behind the synagogue in the hope that he might speak Russian, but he was away for the day. Reluctantly we left our researches to continue the journey to Mikha's village.

. . . . .

From Stalinir the road wound twenty miles more up a mountain canyon and ended suddenly in the village of Djava, nestled at the base of the main Caucasus range. The bus was out of order but Mikha, a resourceful newspaper man, knew how to "fix" things. Producing the credentials of a special "Inspector of the Postal Service" (which he indeed was) he got us places on the mail truck, a Soviet-built Ford driven by a cheerful young Ossetian who thought chauffeuring more fun than herding sheep.

Riding up to Djava with us was a round-faced, ruddy-cheeked Ossetian girl who looked rather like an American Indian except that her expression was far more lively than that of any Indian I had seen. She wore a skirt and shirt-waist and a boy's cap cocked at a rakish angle over her heavy jet braids. Every time the truck broke down, which was every three to fifteen minutes, she would pass the time singing in a rich, low, powerful voice, some strange rhythmical

song of her people. Her black eyes sparkled merrily and her teeth shone and the higher the sides of the canyon rose behind us the higher rose her strong young voice.

Our young groom Mikha struck up a lively conversation with her in their own tongue. Feeling Tanya's eyes upon him, he switched to Russian, and introduced us to the merry Tamara. She was a seventeen-year-old Komsomolka, studying at the Pedagogical Technicum in Stalinir and now homeward bound to her parents for a holiday. Her parents were members of a small fruit-growing collective near Djava. If we had trouble getting horses, said Tamara, we must come home with her. Her father and mother would be delighted. . . .

She broke off to greet a young couple who passed us going north on horseback. The girl wore skirts and rode side-saddle, gracefully swaying with the horse's walk though her feet extended out above bulging saddle bags. They shouted back and forth in Ossetian with Tamara till a curve in the road hid them from view.

"They're taking a short cut across the mountains to the University in Ordjonikidze," Tamara explained. "They were in school with me and they just got married. All their books and things their parents gave them are in those saddle bags."

Later in Mikha's native village we were to learn of the old marriage customs of the Ossetians, and to appreciate more than we could then what it meant for a young bride and groom to be crossing the high mountains to attend a University, or for a girl like Tamara to sing in the presence of men.

Beyond Djava, at the foot of the mountain, wheels could not take us. We got horses, clambered up an almost perpendicular hillside, and started across a beautiful high valley encircled by soft blue and purple mountains and peaks turning crimson in the setting sun. Up narrow gorges we climbed, single file, resting from the breath-taking beauty of the open trail, our saddle bags scraping the sides of trees and the horses slipping on wet rock.

Darkness found us still on the narrow trail, peering blindly over our horses' heads, listening uneasily to the rushing torrent below the precipice. Our horses stumbled into deep mudholes which, Mikha cheerfully explained, were caused by a recent cloudburst.

"Several villages were swept away. I don't know what state the trail will be in ahead."

Further the trail was washed out so badly that Mikha had to dismount and lead each horse in turn to safe ground. Sure-footed and steady-nerved, he picked his way along the edge of the cliff, holding aloft an improvised torch, the pages of one of his precious books. Up ahead of me Tanya called timorously back through the dark to know who had gotten across the washout. Behind me I could hear Mikha's steady directions and the other two horses plunging through mud and water while I waited numb with fear lest they fall over the cliff into the rushing river. It was a tense fifteen minutes. Even Mikha was ready to quit for the night.

He trotted around to the head of our column. "There's a schoolhouse on the mountain up ahead. We'll climb up there and stay till morning." Then, ever the proud guide in his native land, he added:

"It was built three years ago to make my people literate. When my father needed to have a 'paper' written about his taxes, he had to pay one sheep to a man in the next village who could write."

We laughed at the incongruity—Mikha lecturing about education for the masses when he had just burned his political science book to save our lives.

The schoolhouse was locked. Cold and weary and disappointed, we spread our blankets out on the porch and, after hobbling our horses, lay down in one long row and fell asleep under the open sky.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE SONS OF NANI

"Yours, yours, yours,
Yours, the golden cap!
And of silk your clothing
With diamonds and pearls;
Sharp steel—your protection,
A golden blade—your sabre,
A strong tower—your shelter at night,
And the corners full of every good thing;
An easy chair—your seat.
May you live long for our glory!
May your eyes see like the hawk's;
Your hands reach the sky;
Your flanks be like the mountain;
Your cheeks smooth, as an egg,
Your strength, the strength of a bear;
Your heart, the heart of a wolf;
In swiftness the comrade of clouds and tornados,
Then you will be the happy soul of your mother."

(Ossetian cradle song.)

AT NOON THE next day we crossed the last divide and looked down on the village of Nakrebo with its white clay and brown wooden huts fringing a cliff above the river. Two red-tile roofs, the mark of affluence, stood out against the fresh green hillsides of the Kudaro valley. Amidst a maze of wattle fences and rutted lanes, the houses sprawled in crowded disorder a quarter of a mile along the cliff's edge.

Far below the village the turbulent river branched out in a wide bed dotted with little tree-covered islands. Beyond it an almost perpendicular hillside climbed till it was lost in the misty blue ranges of the Caucasus.

Our horses picked their way carefully down the rocky trail and we breathed deep of the crystal-clear air. We

were sighted long before reaching the village and by the time we wound into the yard of Mikha's home a whole caravan of bare-footed little boys was triumphantly bringing up our rear.

Mikha's grand-aunt came out, toothless and bent almost double with age and rheumatism. Her head was draped in black head-clothes, vestigial survivals of the veil formerly worn here. She kissed him warmly and murmured a welcome to us in Ossetian, the only language she knew. Immediately other old women came into the yard from neighbouring cabins to welcome Mikha, inspect his bride, and marvel at Anne and me because we wore trousers on our legs and nothing on our heads. Stooped over, with their black head-clothes, drab clothes and dark wrinkled skins, they looked like a chorus of witches out of *Macbeth*.

"My aunt bids you welcome," Mikha translated in his most dramatic manner. "She is sorry she cannot speak your language. When her son comes down from the haying he will be able to talk Russian with you. In the meantime she asks you to come and rest from the journey."

The cabin had three rooms, all opening off the long dirt-floored veranda. Mikha and Tanya were to occupy the centre room, furnished on one side with a long wooden platform that served as a table, and on the other, a lower wooden platform that served as a bed.

Hanging on the rough board walls were one or two saddles, a "burka" (long black Caucasian cape of pressed wool), an old gun and a very fine sabre in a silver-mounted scabbard. Mikha's cousin had taken it from a White Georgian officer during the Civil War. The walls themselves were unadorned save for fly-specks, except at one end where someone had begun to paper them with old newspapers.

"Wonder why they didn't finish the job?" I asked Mikha.

"Probably ran out of papers. We don't get many here, even now. The mail comes only about once in three weeks." He sauntered over to the wall, suddenly exclaimed in horror

and began hastily to study various sections of the paper. His dark face blanched and he began cursing in Ossetian. Tanya anxiously asked what was the matter.

"Look!" bitterly. He nodded toward the wall. "I had an Ossetian-Russian-German dictionary. A priceless book! You can't buy it any more now. A great German philologist worked thirty years on it—a learned man in Stalinir gave it to me—a very old man who couldn't study any more—and what does my family do as soon as I'm gone? Tear out the pages to paste up the cracks in the wall!"

A moment later he spied on the wall several torn sheets of manuscript—his own poetry! Too hurt to speak, he left us to dig through his papers and learn what else was missing. Characteristically, when he came back he said nothing more on the subject, silenced by shame of his people's cultural backwardness.

Meanwhile in the kitchen the old grand-aunt was busy making us cheese pie, chief delicacy of the mountain Ossetians. She wrapped dough around a thin layer of goat's milk cheese and put it on top of the little iron stove to bake. The old woman sat on the dirt floor in front of the stove, tending the cooking and watching her eight grandchildren, who played about her, barefooted and dirty beyond description. The youngest, only a few months old, lay in a little wooden cradle which she rocked with her foot, his face completely covered with cloth to keep the flies away.

Later I was appalled by the rigorous measures she took to prevent the baby's wetting his clothes. She fitted into place a crude urinal made from the bladder of some animal, and bound his abdomen tightly in order to speed the process of urination. Seeing my concern, Mikha hastened to assure me that the practice was centuries old. "And where will you find stronger men than the Ossetians?" So I pass the information on for whatever it is worth.

Nakrebo was a village of forty families, founded about 150 years before. The story goes that three brothers, feeling

cramped in a village further up the valley, went searching for new home sites. They settled a few miles apart along the valley and built a common fortress tower as a refuge in case of attack. From each of these settlements a village grew, one of which was Nakrebo. All the men in Nakrebo were descended from one of the brothers, Nani, and bore his name—Naniev,[1] "the son of Nani". Wives were always chosen from other families in other mountain villages and daughters were married outside the Naniev clan.

Like others in this region, Nakrebo and every family in it had a largely self-sustaining pastoral economy.

No roads led to their high valley. No wheeled cart ever penetrated closer than a long day's ride to it. Everything brought in from the outside was packed on horseback and the few products—wool, skins and cheese—which Nakrebo sold, were carried out of the valley in the same way. Cattle, sheep and goats, the main sources of livelihood, were driven to market.

Wheat and barley were raised in tiny patches on the hillsides wherever land was not too steep, but as it was impossible to grow enough grain for human needs, the men had to bring corn in from Georgia for bread. The hillsides high above the village were rich in Alpine meadows and the peasants spent much of the summer cutting hay and sliding it down the steep slopes in crude, ox-drawn sleds, to feed their stock during the winter.

As Mikha's home was too small to accommodate us, he got us a room with his neighbour and kinsman, Shupil.

White-bearded Shupil and his sons, Vassili and Kaplan, lived with their wives and children in the finest house in Nakrebo. It was a three-room wooden cabin with a tile roof, built on the same plan as Mikha's but raised six feet off the ground and furnished with glass windows.

Each room had a broad wooden platform to sit and

[1] I suspect that Naniev is the Russianized form of the original name, but we heard no other. Villagers were addressed by their first names.

sleep on, the usual furniture here. But this family owned also, one home-made wooden bed, a cabinet for dishes, a table and three chairs. Vassili and Kaplan, it developed, had spent three years each in a German prison camp during the war where they had learned carpentering and acquired a taste for European culture. In this, of course they differed considerably from their neighbours. But their day-to-day lives were typical of Nakrebo and of countless other mountain villages in the Caucasus.

At dusk Shupil's rangy sons came down from the haying, preceded by their wives who had to carry water from the spring and prepare the meal after a day in the fields. They hung their scythes under the eaves, sat down on the wide wooden platform in the kitchen and ate the hunks of corn bread and cheese pie the women handed them. Then each wound himself a powerful makhorka cigarette in a strip of newspaper, crossed his legs comfortably, and talked with us in broken Russian.

Vassili and Kaplan were handsome, reckless-looking men, with bristling long moustaches curling up at the ends and fur caps cocked on the backs of their heads. With a big black burka flung carelessly across his shoulders against the chill of evening, and with the lamplight glimmering on his strong tanned face, Vassili looked exactly like some dashing Caucasian mountaineer pictured in the travel folders.

Listening to his sons talk and understanding only a few of their Russian words, old Shupil nodded approvingly, adding the weight of his parental blessing to what they said. Shupil's old wife and her daughters-in-law huddled on stools behind the stove twisting wool into yarn in the dim lamplight, barely seen and never heard, as was the custom for women in such a household. We Americans, sitting in this family circle for three weeks with our eyes and ears open, learned about a life backward and colourful and cruel, which is disappearing under the Soviet system.

Shupil was too old at ninety-two to go to the meadow with his sons but he was still nominally the head of the household. His turn came first at night when, as Ossetian custom decreed, the daughters-in-law brought bowls of water and washed the feet of their men.

Though he had begun to stoop, Shupil was still more than six feet tall, and, with his fine white beard and still-bright eyes, dignified and almost as handsome as either of his handsome sons. He wore home-made cloth slippers and leggings, a homespun cherkeska rusty with age but still adorned with a row of cartridge pockets across each breast, and a two-foot dagger stuck in his belt, the famous Caucasian "kinzhal". The dagger was as indispensable to him as a pair of pliers to a Ford mechanic. With it he whittled shavings for the fire, skinned chickens, opened the stove lid, made himself a toothpick. If canned soup comes into vogue during his lifetime I am sure Shupil will use the dagger as a can-opener.

About the dagger he was entirely casual, but he showed us with loving pride a beautifully engraved old flint lock inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which had belonged to his father. That patriarch had died in 1916 at the reputed age of 200, a figure we could find no one in the village to dispute. He was a legendary character, apparently, who in his ripe old age could still kill bear in the woods and tote them home on his own broad shoulders. In his day—even in Shupil's—it was considered wasteful to use powder or lead on anything less than bear or mountain goat. Shupil kept the gun always loaded and ready for emergencies (just what kind we could not see), and prided himself that during the war when his sons were fighting for the Tsar he had fed his family by his skill as a hunter.

Occasionally, while we were there, Shupil spent a day on the river-bed, lugging logs and rocks with which to rebuild his sons' little mill, which had been washed away in the flood. I observed him once in the early morning cutting hay with a scythe in a small field behind the house. He came

in wiping the perspiration from his brow and using the few words of broken Russian that he knew, told me proudly: "I work well."

The old man needed nothing but an interpreter to launch into a story about the past. We pressed his visiting grandson into service.

"Twenty-four years ago I saw a stove in a village over in the next valley. It was the first I had seen and I couldn't sleep, thinking how much I wanted it. I paid a man sixty rubles, two good oxen and one cow—to bring me a stove from Vladikavkaz and I gave him ten rubles to put it together in my house. People came from all around to see it. They said I was crazy to spend so much. They said I should have bought oxen with the money."

Before that, Shupil had had an open fire in his house with a hole in the roof to let out the smoke. Food was cooked in a cauldron hung on a chain from the ceiling. Logs were placed around the fire "to keep it hot longer", and the ashes piled high in front of it. The more ashes a man had on his hearth the more respected he was. In 1934 we saw many smoke-blackened huts in the Kudaro valley, and at least one with ashes piled in the middle of the floor waiting for the winter when the fire would again be built near the ash pile.

But Shupil would not use his smoke-blackened kitchen for the new stove. He built a special room for it.

"My old father was blind by that time. He came into the new room and felt the stove. 'Where will you put the logs and the ashes?' he said. I told him this stove didn't need logs and ashes piled around it. We lit the fire and when he felt the warmth coming out of the stove he was satisfied. 'This is good,' he said. 'What will men not think of next? Soon they will even try to fly.'"

Shupil smiled a delighted, toothless smile, remembering his pride and joy on that great day.

The old man knew many stories about Ossetian history handed down by his grandfathers, delightful to hear and,

we suspected, of doubtful authenticity. All were concerned with wars between the Georgians and Ossetians—how this shrewd Ossetian had foiled the manoeuvres of that wily Georgian, how his father had gone with other men to fight the Georgian princes when Shupil was a small boy . . . and so on ad infinitum. He told us further, of an ancient book on the history of the Ossetians owned and kept up to date by a distant relative who lived on a far-away pass in the Caucasus.

"The pages are of parchment and the writing in the first part of it is not writing at all, but big and little knots tied in the gut of some animal. Later on the writing is in Greek, then Georgian and now it is in Ossetian."

"Who can read it?"

"Only the man who has the book can read all of it. He got it from his father, who taught him how to read it. That man was taught by his father, and so it goes back to a time no one remembers. The book was started by an Ossetian king who wrote in each year what had happened to his people. When he died it fell into the hands of a learned man who gave it to his son."

"Has any scientist ever seen this book?"

Shupil did not know, but his grandson Georgi answered for him.

"No. The old man won't let any outsiders see it. He thinks they'll take it away from him."

Georgi had seen the book. A student in an Ordjonikidze University, he realized to some extent the scientific value of such a document. Scientists themselves were not yet agreed upon the origin of the Ossetians and this might throw some light on the question. But Georgi did not want to betray the trust the old man put in him. So the secret of the great book remained in the mountains.

Shupil remembered when taxes began in the Kudaro valley. According to his simple version the Georgian princes said to the Ossetians: "This land is ours. You must pay us for using it." They were stronger so the Ossetians paid.

The Georgians demanded thirty kopeks the first year, forty the second, fifty the third. The following year they raised the tax to two rubles and then to four rubles and a cheese.

"An ox then was worth only twenty-five rubles. The Georgians kept raising the tax till they were getting a tenth of our income. Men who were too poor to pay taxes hid up high in the mountains and died of starvation."

Eventually the Georgians tired of coming into the mountains and fighting for the money. They turned the job over to the rich Ossetians, demanding that they collect from the poor ones and in turn pay them for the privilege. It is little wonder that so many Ossetians fought bitterly during the Civil War against the princes who had oppressed them.

Forty years before the revolution, according to Shupil, the Georgian princes said: "If you give us 250 rubles outright you will never have to pay any more taxes." Shupil sold almost every sheep and cow he owned to raise the money so he could be free of taxation forever.

"And then the revolution came and we have to pay taxes again," he concluded dolefully. It looked to Shupil as though the Georgians and the Soviets had conspired against him.

"Was it better to pay to the Georgians than to the Soviet government?"

"It was easier to live before," he replied, thinking apparently of the many sheep his sons had killed because they were afraid of having them collectivized. "The Soviet power gives schools. That is good. I can't read a letter. But my grandson here goes to the University. That is good.

"The Soviet power—that is good," said Shupil. "But collectivization? No! I don't like it."

CHAPTER XXXIII

SOCIALISM VERSUS SUPERSTITION

"If your animal sees a water-rat, or if he is unable to pass water, then he will swell and die unless a charm is said. That is what the people believe. In order that the animal remain unharmed it is necessary to utter this charm silently to one's self; to blow and then spit on the animal.

"'On the sun I saw a star;
From the mouth of a snake I saved a frog;
Out of my mouth I pulled a mouse.
On the nikhas[1] three men were sitting,
They are my witnesses.
To the extent that this is the truth I am telling
To such an extent will it be medicine for the animal
on whom I spit.'"

(Ossetian charm for the protection of animals.)

. . . . .

SHUPIL DISLIKED COLLECTIVIZATION and so did his sons, though they did not tell us so as bluntly as their father. Strong, shrewd, and able, Vassili and Kaplan would probably have been prosperous peasants—kulaks—under another system.

They were "good managers". One of them went each winter to Tiflis to work as a carpenter, bringing home money with which to buy new animals. The other stayed in the village to care for the livestock and women and children. Before collectivization was heard of they owned a good many more than the four cows and three oxen they had when we arrived. Shupil then looked proudly upon his sons and foresaw that they would be rich.

When the word "collectivization" echoed through the mountains, followed by the rumour that the flocks would be confiscated and turned over to collective herds, the

[1] Village loafing place marked by large stones on which the men sit.

mountaineers did just what the peasants on the steppe had done . . . butchered their animals by the tens of thousands. The resulting milk, meat and leather shortage is too well known to need dwelling upon here. But, whereas on the steppe collectivization was very well established by 1934, here in the mountains it was still a matter of bitter controversy.

No full collective farm had ever been established in Nakrebo. But in 1933 all the families in the villages had merged their milk cattle in a co-operatively-owned dairy.[1] At the district centre, among such other evidences of government aid as the schoolhouse, hospital, co-operative store and restaurant, the government set up a small cheese factory to buy the co-operative's milk. Most wonderful of all, a modern cream-separator was brought by horseback into this valley which had hitherto seen no mechanical device more complicated than a crude grindstone. The collective dairy prospered. Its organizers were emboldened to finish modernizing Nakrebo by making grain cultivation collective as well. Here they failed.

Advantages obvious enough in the first co-operative venture were not so readily seen here. After the villagers had pooled their land they squabbled. Ossetians were used to jumping on a horse and riding off whenever they felt like it. But in the collective they had to work on schedule. They were used to going down to the district centre on Sunday and sitting all day over the wine cups. But in the collective, if the crop was ready, they had to work even on Sunday.

"We are tied," they said. So one after another, the members withdrew, each taking with him the oxen and tools he had contributed. The grain collective fell apart and under this impetus the dairying collective also dissolved.

According to Vassili, collectivization would not go in the mountains.

[1] Organized in the form of a "comradeship", a rudimentary form of collective farm.

"Our land's so rocky it takes four oxen to pull a single ploughshare through it. We bring the grain down in sleds. The hill's so steep we don't need snow to slide. We don't get much grain anyway. Our sheep and cows are what keep us.

"Down on the steppe collectives are good. Our brother in Nogir belongs to one. They get tractors. But we can't use tractors. Our land's too steep! Our patches are too small! We've got to work with our oxen and our own backs, each man for himself."

Mikha's cousin Efim, a Communist who never stopped his campaign for the collective, said:

"The collective can give, besides tractors, good organization of men and animals. We could make better use of the land we have. What they want," referring to his opponents on this issue, "is to be free to do as they want every day, without having to listen to others." He wiped the dust off the cream separator that stood in his house unused since the disintegration of the milk collective.

"Ten miles from here a village has just built a fine new winter barn for the cattle. Some of our men went up to see it. They'd like to have a barn like that. They'll get the idea one of these days that together they can build barns. Alone they only dream about them."

In another small village a few miles down the valley, the battle for collectivization had reached a climax. The president of the collective slept with his gun beside him in a different friend's home every night, evading the men who had sworn to "get" him if he did not quit trying to organize the herdsmen. His Ukrainian wife, a fighter such as one finds not seldom among peasant women on the steppe, backed him up. She kept a loaded gun beside her own bed, determined to fight to the death those richer herdsmen who would not let the poorer ones work together.

The chairman, his face gaunt from overwork and restless sleep, told us bitterly: "There is no Soviet power yet in the Caucasus."

"You're tired," said his wife soothingly. "Once we show them the collective will work, everything will be all right."

. . . . .

Nakrebo villagers had learned a lesson from their short period of collectivization. They had seen how land that had been pooled could be redistributed when they no longer wanted to share it in common. That gave rise to a shrewd scheme which Vassili told us about with a half-shame-faced grin.

The Nanievs and two large families of cousins, each representing a village, had for generations shared a fine meadow with two other villages.

"We decided to redistribute the land," said Vassili. "Redistributing the land" to them meant squeezing the other two families out and taking the whole meadow for themselves.

"They didn't like that." Vassili winked. "So one day all the men from the five villages went up to the pasture to fight it out. There were 300 of us . . . our three families on one side of the meadow—the other two families on the other. We could have settled it with our daggers."

But someone down at the district centre got wind of the plan and notified the Djava militia that there was about to be an old-fashioned massacre. Ten men on horseback, heavily armed and backed by the full power of the Soviet law, climbed up the mountains at night and reached the meadow shortly after dawn.

"Before we could get started, here they come on a gallop and line up between us. They had rifles and pistols. We had only daggers. What could we do?"

Faced by the "Soviet law" thus armed, the native warriors hesitated. A dozen leaders of both factions were arrested before they knew what had happened. The rest were routed. Shamefaced and sullen, they trudged slowly home.

"The Soviet power doesn't like men to fight," concluded Vassili with a philosophic shrug. But he shook his head

regretfully. He liked a fight. Since time immemorial his people had settled their problems with the "kinzhal".

The jumble of traditions and superstitions and strange beliefs weaving through the half-pagan, half-Christian religion which still lived in Southern Ossetia, confounded us Americans. But the older Ossetians in 1934 still accepted them without question.

Nearly everything Vassili and Kaplan did was influenced by taboos and fears.

Vassili would never start on a journey without first sending his wife out to make sure that a certain neighbour woman was nowhere in the vicinity. Why? Because she had, for him, an "evil eye" and it would bring him misfortune if she looked at him when he began an undertaking.

On Friday he would never begin a new job of any kind. Neither would he begin it on Monday, or on Wednesday. It goes without saying that Sunday was a day of rest.

The men came down from the haying early one Saturday because it was raining. Shaking his head dolefully, Vassili said, "It's bad. We need fifteen more days of good weather to get enough hay in for the winter. If the rain doesn't stop we won't get it."

Sunday was a beautiful day for haying. But Sunday was a holiday. The brothers sauntered down to the district centre and stood around for hours talking with their friends from other villages. The local wineshop manager was off on a trip to Stalinir to buy wine. There was nothing to drink and conversation was dull. But nobody thought of working.

Monday rolled around, bright and sunny, and still they did not go to work.

"What's the matter?" I asked Vassili.

"Monday's a holiday too."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know," vaguely. "It's always been that way. We used to work only five days a week till the collective came along and tried to make us work all the time. Now we're going back to the old way."

All morning groups of men sauntered up and down the village, making sure that no one went to the meadow.

"But I thought you didn't work collectively. Why do you have to rest collectively?" I asked. "Why can't every man do as he pleases?"

Vassili was vague as to the reason. All he knew was that village ethics forbade haying or harvesting on a holiday.

"It's all right to fix your mill or to dry grain at home. But no one must go to the fields."

The villagers called themselves Christians. But the only signs of religious observance we saw in three weeks were decidedly more pagan than Christian. On a mountain-top an hour's stiff climb above the village there was a "church" . . . a big iron cross under the sky. Vassili told us reverently that the cross had been "sent by the Tsar himself". The ground beneath it was covered with the drippings of thousands of candles the Nanievs had burned to the Christian God. But around the candle drippings and stretching a good many yards down the hillside, were the bones of oxen and sheep they had eaten in wild festivals, survival of earlier feasts to the pagan god of the harvest.

Even Mikha was astonished that we thought the combination a strange one. Vassili, of course, accepted it without question. He complained, however, that it was a trifle inconvenient to have the cross in that particular spot.

"The meadow's just below it and Kaplan and I have the section nearest the cross. The women can't help us on the upper stretches. And we have to quit before dark."

"Why?"

"It's holy ground. Women mustn't come near."

Nakrebo had another church in the grove of trees on a hill behind the village. Vassili and Kaplan urged us to have a look at it so we went up with Mikha one day. We wandered through the gloomy shade, stumbling over gravestones crumbling to ruins from the dampness, but saw no sign of a building.

"Where's the church?" we finally asked Mikha.

"This." He swung his arm in a circle, indicating the whole grove. His people needed no building in which to worship. Then he took us to the centre where a circular space outlined in rocks marked an ancient fireplace. Two lines of logs, flattened at the top, spread out in four directions from it.

"When a man died the men and boys came here to bury him. Three days we would sit, feasting and drinking araka (Ossetian vodka), telling stories and showing our skill in sports and shooting. It was very gay!"

Vassili believed in a seer who could foretell the future. With his small grey eyes gleaming and his broad mustachios upturned in a confiding grin, he told us one night about the seer who "dreamed" that his (Vassili's) horse was injured. The shrewd Vassili thereupon went riding down to Stalinir and sold his horse to a Georgian for a good price. Within the year the horse died, proof of the seer's power and Vassili's good business sense.

In connection with this clever deal, he told us about a "smart Ingush" who was riding to market on a camel near the Azerbaidjan desert.

"The camel got stubborn and wouldn't go. The Ingush got mad, and swore to Allah if ever he got that camel to the market he would sell it for fifteen kopeks."

During the night, however, jogging along on the now-docile camel, the Ingush thought better of his words. But he had sworn to Allah! So when he got to market he hung a sign on the camel—"For Sale—Price Fifteen Kopeks". Lower on the sign he wrote: "Buyer must also take my cat—price 100 rubles."

"Pretty smart Ingush," concluded Vassili admiringly.

I asked him if he had ever ridden on a camel.

"No! God forbid! It would be like riding on the ceiling. The owner taps the camel's knee and the animal lies down. Then the man gets on and is raised up, just like an airplane."

Vassili would not eat bear's meat. Some people did, but

God forbid that he should do it! Neither would he eat rabbit, though the woods abounded in them and, since the livestock slaughter, his family had had little meat.

"Why . . . it has ears like a donkey, feet like a dog and a face like a cat. Who can eat such an animal?"

. . . . . .

We stood on the veranda one night while thunder rumbled over far canyons and jagged lightning flashed on lonely peaks.

"Anyone ever killed by lightning up here?" I asked Vassili.

He turned to me uneasily.

"It always strikes where the devil is."

"What devil?"

"Why . . . a devil! Just a devil!" unable to understand my question. "The other day a man was riding along and lightning struck at the devil hiding under his saddle. The horse just burned up and died but he wasn't hurt."

"The lightning just happened to hit the horse," I scoffed.

"Oh, no!" credulously. "You can't tell where a devil may be lurking."

According to Vassili, a lake ten miles away from Nakrebo was inhabited by devils.

"If you pass there on a windy night you can hear them crying and wailing to each other. If a person goes by the lake alone at night, he'll go mad and die."

His nephew Georgi, standing near us, put in: "My parents' village is near the lake. People *have* gone mad after passing it alone at night. When I was riding over here the other day I met a man who said: 'Aren't you afraid to pass the lake alone? I wouldn't go near it alone in broad daylight!' When I asked him why I should be afraid he said: 'If you had seen what I've seen today, you'd be afraid too!'"

The man was passing a small village earlier in the day when suddenly he saw the roof of a house burst into flames.

He jumped off his horse, grabbed a bucket of water and tried unsuccessfully to put the fire out. Neighbours came to his aid and they finally managed to smother the flames. Then they told him that devils had caused the fire, the tenth one in as many days. Each time it was put out and each time it started again. The owners of the house had moved out, convinced that the devils were in league to make them miserable. All the village was terrified.

I suggested to Georgi, when he finished the story, that doubtless the first fire was started by spontaneous combustion, and the others because something was left smouldering under the roof.

"You don't believe it's a devil do you, Georgi?"

Georgi, the son of Shupil's daughter, was nineteen years old, a fair-skinned thoughtful boy who had been born in the village near the lake and taken to Ordjonikidze a few years after the revolution. After finishing school he worked as a construction worker and wanted to study further, so his trade union was sending him to the University. Now he said:

"Of course there's a scientific explanation for the fire. The noises in the lake can be explained too. There are springs under it, bubbling up and causing the sounds.

"But why do people go mad?" he asked suddenly, his face tense. "A few years ago a woman walked by the lake alone at night. In the morning she was found dead. Her clothes were torn and there was a mad look on her face. People said she had died in a fit of madness."

He recounted several similar stories. When he finished he challenged me nervously: "Pretty hard to explain all those people going mad!"

I maintained that nobody knew they went mad. Possibly they had been killed by some enemy who knew the devils would get the blame. If that woman had a weak nervous system and bad heart she might have died of fright. That did not mean there were devils in the lake.

"No."

Georgi acquiesced with obvious relief. He wanted to believe me. But it was evident by his troubled face that, the superstition he had imbibed with his mother's milk was fighting the scientific explanations he had learned in the University.

Seeing Georgi's credulity I could not blame the uneducated Vassili for swallowing every superstitious belief he heard. On a dark night, when lightning flashed and thunder crashed in the lonely mountains, such stories were enough to upset the nervous systems of persons considerably more able to explain mysterious fires and noises than these backward mountaineers.

Georgi realized very well the handicaps he laboured under because of his people's "uncultured" background. Not the least of these was the fact that Russian was to him a foreign tongue. His engineering school in Ordjonikidze, training men and women of half a dozen different nationalities, was necessarily conducted in Russian.

His past could not be altered. But he pleaded with Vassili and Kaplan to let their boys, aged eight and ten, return with him to the lowlands.

"Let them grow up to be educated men," he pleaded with their barely literate fathers. "They can live with my father and mother in Nogir. In the school there they will learn Russian. Here they aren't getting on well with it. When they want to enter the University they'll have a hard time like me." There was no doubt in his mind that the sons of the herdsmen Vassili and Kaplan, would enter the University.

Old Shupil objected to the plan. "If the boys go away who will get me a drink when I am thirsty?" But Vassili and Kaplan, sensing that times were changing, did not heed him. Neither, however, did they consult with the mothers of the boys. Times had not changed enough for that. They conferred with Georgi, and each other.

CHAPTER XXXIV

OSSETIAN WOMEN—SEEN BUT NOT HEARD

"Oh, Mother, your daughter who lit the morning fire,
Is being married!
Oh, Mother, your daughter, who spread your bed at night,
Is being married!
Oh, Mother, your daughter, who cleared away your bed in the morning,
Is being married!
Oh, Mother, your daughter, who banked your fires at night,
Is being married!
Oh, Mother, your daughter, your prop in dire need,
Is being married!
Oh, Mother, your daughter, who swept your floors in the morning,
Is being married!
Oh, Mother, your daughter, who carried your water in the morning,
Is being married!
Oh, Mother, your daughter, who poured water over your hands in the morning,
Is being married!
Oh, Mother, that one whom you fed with your last crust
Today is being led away by a proud youth
With song . . . alai . . . bulai. . . ."

(Ossetian "Song of the Mother.")

NONE OF THE women in Shupil's household spoke Russian. So until Georgi arrived and interpreted for us, we could only watch them and guess what was going on behind their meek brows.

Dedo (Grandma) was eighty-nine, little and stooped, with a puckered face and head swathed in the inevitable black cloths. She wore a skirt and blouse that she must have had when she married, and on her gnarled right forefinger she sported a silver wedding ring decorated with three crosses. She kept an eye on the three grandchildren—occasionally prevented their running into the room which

we three Americans shared, but more often came with them to gaze in silent wonderment while we prepared food or changed our clothes after a hike.

Like all women she was interested in clothes. She used to rub the cloth of our skirts between her fingers and murmur approvingly "hors", which means good in Ossetian. Her old eyes sparkled with excitement the first time she watched Anne at work on her typewriter. Thereafter the click of the keys was an invitation to her (and soon to the rest of the village) to come in and look at the wonderful Americans and the wonderful machine.

But most of the time Dedo lay half asleep on her pile of rags on the porch. Possibly she was not well, though her scolding sounded spirited enough. And anyway she did not have to work. For that she had two daughters-in-law.

These were slender quiet women in their middle thirties who wore tight bodices, voluminous skirts and heavy cotton stockings on the hottest days. Their heads, too, were draped in ugly black cloths, a symbol of their married state. They walked silently about the house in black cloth slippers, scarcely speaking even to each other in the presence of the men.

They were as unobtrusive as well-trained servants and their work was never done. All day long they helped in the fields. Returning at dusk they went to the spring for water, milked the cow, washed the children, baked corn bread and cheese pie for the family. After the men had eaten and the children fallen asleep on the broad wooden bench in the kitchen, they would sit on little stools behind the stove mending slippers for the family or twisting wool into coarse rough yarn for socks.

As a last gesture of submission, every night, when the men finished talking and wanted to sleep the young wives brought bowls of water into the kitchen and washed first their fathers'-in-law and then their husbands' feet. So it had always been in the mountains. And so it still was in Nakrebo seventeen years after the revolution.

One Sunday when Vassili and Kaplan strolled down to the district centre for some refreshment, we pressed Georgi into service and talked with the women. Their husbands had discussed sending their sons out of the mountains to school. I asked Liza, Vassili's wife, what she thought of the plan. For answer she pointed to Jack.

"Didn't his mother let him go away to study? My girl will go too, when she's older. Our children will not live as we did."

Sensitive Liza, with the lovely pale brow and sad mouth and braid of beautiful golden hair hidden under her ugly black kerchief, shyly put her arm around my waist and told me through Georgi:

"Ah, if I only knew your language—how much I would tell you! How much I would ask about your life!"

With Georgi she was not afraid to talk. Georgi she had known as a child and, moreover, he told her that in Ordjonikidze women were equal with men. She herself had never been further than the village ten miles down the valley in which she was born. In the newspapers she had seen pictures of automobiles and airplanes. But in reality she had never seen even an ox-drawn cart with wheels.

Like other women in the village, Liza as a young girl had been sold into marriage for so many oxen. She had cried and thought of killing herself with her brother's dagger. But in the end she had submitted.

"What could I do?"

Both her children had been born in the stable. Women were considered unclean during childbirth, not fit to be under the same roof with men. Many women died in labour and many babies died in infancy.

Liza wondered whether the fact that she was attended only by an old crone accounted for her five-year-old girl's limp. I showed her how she could build up the child's shoe so that the quarter-inch difference in the length of her chubby legs would not result in a spinal curvature.

The mother's beautiful smile of thanks was rich reward.

She put her hand on the head of her daughter, a merry little freckle-faced girl whom she loved with a tenderness touching to see.

"I want her to grow up tall and straight. She will go to school in Ordjonikidze, just like the boy. She will walk with her head bare, like you. And she will travel to far places. She will not bear her children in the cow shed as I did. She will have a better life."

Poor Liza, with the capacity for imagining a better life—so sad and wistful and hurt, and resigned at thirty-five to have nothing better for herself. It hurt me to see it, and roused compassion I had felt for no one else. No one else I met in the U S S R seemed to embody so poignantly intense a longing for a life free from degradation, and a spiritual and physical delicacy or lack of "toughness" that made it impossible for her to fight for it.

. . . . .

Vassili also wanted his daughter to have a better life. But he accepted that prospect with the same stolid good nature as he accepted his wife's submission to the old customs. He laughed when he told us a story illustrating the changing attitude toward women.

A friend from another village came to visit them and the playful little girl won his heart.

"Fine grand-daughter you have there," he said to Dedo. "She ought to be worth a good horse."

"No," grumbled the old woman, dissatisfied. "Girls nowadays aren't worth a cat."

Dedo herself, at the tender age of ten, had been sold into marriage for "four oxen, four cows, and a big brass kettle" she proudly told us. The poor little bride cried so much for her mother that her father-in-law, "a very kind man", sent her home for two years. After that, quite mature and resigned to her lot, she returned and became a dutiful wife. She married her own daughters off between the ages of thirteen and sixteen.

"Did they cry?" I asked her.

"Yes, they cried."

"Weren't you sorry for them?"

"Yes. But what could I do? Girls must get used to the family they're going to live with. It's harder for them if they enter it after they're grown."

The answer seemed a very reasonable one. Girls in these mountains were married off not to be loved and cherished but to work for their husbands and their husband's family.

A few years before in a neighbouring village a nineteen-year-old girl was bought to be the wife of an eight-year-old boy. Why? Because the boy's mother was getting too old to carry the water and milk the cow and grind the meal and wash the clothes in the river. She had no other son whose wife might have helped her so, in the name of the child, she bought herself a daughter-in-law to do the work. In the early days of their marriage the wife used to hold the husband in her arms like a baby, but eventually he grew up and she bore him three sons.

Georgi told us that in his village a sixty-year-old man, finding that his old wife was no longer able to help him in the fields, had recently paid 300 rubles in advance for another, a young girl. Buying and selling of wives is, of course, forbidden by law and polygamy is in general not approved by Ossetian tradition.[1] But in the mountains the law is still far away and in this particular village the tradition of monogamy was not strictly enforced, perhaps owing to the influence of Mohammedan neighbours.

The brothers of the bride-to-be were not averse to turning a profitable deal, so when a second marriage offer came along, accompanied by a thousand rubles, they pocketed the thousand, not bothering to mention that their sister was already "promised". Then the trouble began.

The girl was a Komsomol. She refused to go to either husband and told her brothers, moreover, that she would

[1] Except in a few regions where the Ossetians were not converted to Christianity and retained their Mohammedan faith.

report them to the Soviet law if they tried to make her do so. They, meanwhile, had spent the money and could make no recompense to either "husband". The wife-buyers were afraid to complain for fear of getting themselves into trouble for breaking the law. And killing the brothers in the good old Caucasian custom would only have brought the law down on them harder than ever. So the matter was left hanging, and no doubt it still hangs.

Wrinkled old Dedo had been standing by while Georgi told this story, listening, but of course not understanding, apparently thinking her own thoughts. Now she began talking to him excitedly. A quiet smile spread over Georgi's fair face.

"She's scolding me because I'm not married yet. She thinks nineteen is too old."

"Tell her if you're going to be an engineer you won't have to bring your wife to live with your family. So it isn't so important to marry young."

Watching me with her quick bright eyes, Dedo concluded that I, too, was trying to show Georgi the error of his ways. Before he could translate what I had said, she burst out triumphantly: "See! We've laughed at you because you have no wife and now she's laughing too!"

When Georgi told her what I actually had said she turned away without a word, impatient with the folly of the younger generation. That women removed their veils she quite approved, but all this nonsense about marriage she could not accustom herself to.[1]

[1] Old Dedo was not the only Soviet citizen who found it hard to give up old customs. A well-known American engineer, who spent several years in Central Asia, tells of the experience of one of his associates, a Russian engineer. The latter, on some mission, put up one night in the home of a villager not too familiar with Russian custom but anxious to extend every courtesy to his guest. After wining and dining his visitor, the host as a crowning gesture of hospitality, sent his handsome young daughter to spend the night with the honoured guest. The Russian, too scrupulous to accept this favour, demurred and finally insisted that this was carrying courtesy too far.

Whereupon, next day, he was hailed into the local court by the outraged host and accused of insulting a member of a national minority. Among people just made aware of their equality with the Russians the engineer might have

Times were indeed changing faster than Dedo could keep track of them.

The government had built a hospital down at the district centre near Nakrebo. "It has a special room for women when they bear their children. No more do women lie down with the cows when their time comes," she told us.

That hospital had done wonders to spirits as well as bodies. In this remote valley with, as yet, no roads connecting it with the outside world, the advantages of the Soviet system were, it seemed to us, slow to be felt. Yet a hospital, a school for the children, a co-operative store where women could buy manufactured cloth, were infinitely more than they had ever had before and pointed the way to a better future.

The surest proof we had that the yoke was lifting from the women's shoulders was the fact that divorce was known in the Kudaro valley. It was still very rare, of course, but Georgi pointed out three cases where women had left husbands who mistreated them. Fear of such reprisal was leading some men to be more considerate of their wives. Georgi knew of no instance where a man had left his wife. Having bought and paid for a wife, a man would as soon leave his cow or his horse or any other of his worldly goods.

Significantly, the divorces occurred only in villages where there was a collective farm. This was not mere chance. Only by joining the collective, working and sharing in the proceeds, could a woman in a mountain village earn a living independently of her husband. Otherwise she was economically tied to him and must remain tied in every other way.

We met one divorcée who, however, was not a village woman. She was a twenty-eight-year-old prosecuting attorney who rode bare-headed and alone up and down the high valleys of the Caucasus administering Soviet justice. A flush spread over her serious face when she confessed that

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fared badly but for the chance arrival of a visiting jurist. The latter explained that it was unfamiliarity with local custom and not contempt that had prompted the visitor to reject his host's hospitality, and the Russian was released.

when she married, she too had washed her husband's feet.

"But later I learned I was his equal and did not have to humiliate myself before him. He refused to understand so I left him."

Another advanced woman was Tamara, the jet-haired Komsomol girl with whom we had ridden up from Stalinir in the mail truck. She had energy, confidence, joy of life in abundance and not a trace of the submissiveness that characterized the earlier uneducated woman. She knew what the Soviets wanted to do, believed in it, and understood her own people. She seemed the perfect example of the new generation that was to bring civilization, and equality for women, into the mountains.

. . . . .

We stayed three weeks in Nakrebo, not seeing a newspaper nor hearing a word from the outside world. We would have liked to remain indefinitely, walking from village to village, talking with the people, washing our clothes in the river and then sleeping in the sun on the lovely green-treed islands. But our three friends had to return to their jobs. And my husband and I had already arranged for passage back to America.

Our trip out of the mountains was to be one of uncertain duration. We planned to go by horseback over the nearby range to the little town of Oni at the southern end of the Ossetian Military Highway—from there, on foot, with a native driver and a two-wheeled cart to carry our food and blankets, for four days over the ancient highway, less known but more beautiful than the famous Georgian road.—Past forests and waterfalls and rivers and glaciers and over the Great Divide of the Caucasus, down to a town where we could get a train to Ordjonikidze and civilization. In Ordjonikidze, our money gone, we were to sit for a week, selling our clothes in the market-place while we waited for Moscow friends to send us the train-fare home.

So, planning the trip and only imagining its delays and adventures, we prepared to leave Nakrebo. Liza and her sister-in-law and Dedo and old Shupil and Mikha's female relatives and the more bold of the neighbour women, stood quietly in the yard watching while the men tightened the straps on the horses and tested each load to be sure it was balanced and firmly tied. No longer did the women point at our breeches and laugh at our bare heads, which at first had seemed so strange to them.

Liza kissed me warmly: "Come again! Come again!" There was no one to translate at any length. Already mounted, I managed to say through Mikha:

"You'll let the boys go next year to Ordjonikidze?"

"Yes, yes, when they're a little bigger. And the girl too. They will not live as we did."

We wound slowly through the crooked lanes of the village and in each yard there were women and children and a few men to wave at us. Mikha's cousin and Vassili and Kaplan accompanied us some distance down the valley in the hospitable Ossetian custom of seeing off departing guests.

"Disgrace—that there's no wine in the wineshop," grumbled Vassili with the green eyes and mischievous upturned moustachios. "We can't give you a proper send-off without wine."

Where the trail left the river we stopped to shake hands all around. Then Mikha took the lead and we climbed single-file out of that enchanting green valley and regretfully left it to go into the "more cultured" world beyond the mountains.

CHAPTER XXXV

HOMEWARD BOUND

THE LAST WE saw of the Soviet Union was Kronstadt Fortress—formidable, silent, watchful—looming up from the calm, night-darkened sea.

PART V

AFTER TWO YEARS

CHAPTER XXXVI

SOVIET CITIZENS—1937

WHAT HAS HAPPENED since I left the USSR, to the Soviet citizens described in these pages?

To tell their stories is to chronicle the advances their country has made. Almost without exception their letters deal with that, and relatively little with themselves.

. . . . .

Old Shupil,[1] the Ossetian patriarch in whose remote mountain home we lived, left his native valley last fall for a visit with one of his sons "in the flat lands" on the outskirts of Ordjonikidze. Although the "flat lands" were only a narrow strip of valley surrounded by towering mountains, Shupil "pined for the hills" and soon made the long trip up over the divide to his own Nakrebo.

His two youngest grandsons have not yet gone out of the mountains to study. Shupil's family are well, with one exception. Beautiful, wistful Liza, who wanted only to see her daughter live a better life than she had, has died—too soon to see her hopes fulfilled.

Georgi does not write much about the women of his family. He did, however, once send me a clipping from *Pravda* reporting a conference of 200 Ossetian "girls of the mountains" held in Ordjonikidze. Among them, all under twenty-five years of age, were "engineers, doctors, agronomists, teachers, parachutists, alpine climbers and bicyclists"—just such educated young women, with bared heads, as Liza would have liked to see her daughter become.

Georgi's reason for sending the clipping was that one of the delegates described in it was "little Anya Azhikaev"

[1]Chapter XXXII.

from his own village, Nogir. Anya left school after finishing the fifth grade, supported herself, was within a year elected vice-chairman of the Nogir Village Soviet, and later sent to study in Moscow. Now, at twenty, she is assistant editor of a district newspaper.

The *Pravda* reporter describes other delegates and visitors:

. . . the Komsomolka Tsurova, twenty years old. She works at a railroad repair shop in Northern Ossetia. Tsurova is studying foreign languages and taking a correspondence course at the Moscow Transport Institute. . . .

The grey-haired old woman Chabakhan, dry as a lemon from which the juice has been squeezed, has come into the hall. What has drawn her here—to this meeting where the oldest is not more than twenty-five years, where the smiles of youth are flowering, where the girls of Northern Ossetia are meeting?

"And to think," she says, "that my youth might have been like this! By the way, I am not yet so old as you think."

"Don't be upset, little grandmother," said the trim Komsomolka Tsurova, tenderly putting her arm around the old woman.

Thus, arms around each other, they sit for a long time, silently looking at one another. One is eighty-seven, the other twenty. Two lives—two youths.

"Youth!" says the old woman. "Such a word we did not know in the old days. I was a girl, became a wife, a mother. Life was hard, all the same.

"I was the little sister in our family. . . . One day I saw my brother saddling his horse. 'Where are you going, Taisariko?' 'To visit my friend,' he said. Next day he returned and was silent. I wondered what had happened. Then I found out. He had gone to sell me for a wife. I wanted to kill myself. They hid the kinzhal away; three days I starved myself. . . . But I had to go to a man I did not love.

"Work like an ox, don't unbend your back, wash your husband's feet, bear your children in the grain field, deserted by everyone. This was our life. . . ."

The eighty-year-old woman Kyaba Khotsaev had someone write a letter for her to the Conference of Young Women. In it she tells about her daughter, many years ago,—well-built, beautiful, with long braids, sixteen-year-old Fardaus. A blind old man, a mullah, wanted to take Fardaus for his wife. Her mother objected, then the husband beat her up and the daughter went to be the wife of a blind old man.

The conference ended with a resolution addressed to Stalin. It read in part:

Our goal is clear as the waters of Gizeldon; our life is beautiful and majestic, just as grey Kazbek is beautiful and majestic.

But only a few short years ago our mothers' lives were bitter. Their lives were gloomy, like the gloomy ravine on a dark night, their youth was pitiable as the beggar's bundle is pitiable.

. . . Our deepest wish is to devote ourselves unselfishly to the building of a new, flowering life. . . . We promise to be worthy daughters of our great country, worthy pupils of our teacher Stalin.

Great changes have come to the Kudaro Valley in the short time since we left it. Discovery of mineral deposits has speeded road building; the trail where our horses almost bogged down in mud-holes now echoes to the rumble of heavy trucks.

Georgi, old Shupil's student grandson, is still studying, at present in the Ossetian Pedagogical Institute in Ordjonikidze. His letters speak often of the progress his region is making:

Nogir Village,
Ordjonikidze,
North Caucasus, USSR,
July 6, 1935.

GREETINGS, SEEMA!

In the first place, accept from the soul of Georgi heartfelt sincere greetings. I apologize for calling you comrade, but I think there were comradely feelings between us and this is not a mistake since we both come from a working people. . . .

I read your last letter to my comrades and they talked and asked questions about you and your husband. "Why did they leave the Soviet Union when there is unemployment in their country?" they said. "Maybe they also will be unemployed."

As you know, here there are not only no unemployed but even a labour shortage. I will give you an example from our own valley in Southern Ossetia.[1] Do you remember the lake

[1] Georgi's people had moved some years before from their native mountain valley in Southern Ossetia to the village of Nogir, near Ordjonikidze.

along the trail where you came into our valley? The lake that people said had devils in it? There they have found anthracite deposits. And in nearby Kais they have found zinc, lead, and tin. So now they are building an automobile highway to the place!

In Tsarist Russia, and even when you were there, there was so much mud that even horses could not get through. Now—imagine to yourself—new factories and new roads are being built. Think how many workers will be needed. All this exists in our little valley. What there is in larger regions you can imagine. . . .

I have entered the second year of the Pedagogical Institute. I got my scholarship money for a vacation so am resting now in Nogir. The villagers are harvesting and soon they will thresh. . . .

The following comrades send you greetings:

1. Tatri, Mikha's brother.
2. Mitush, teacher in Nogir, aged twenty-two years.
3. Dom, student at Moscow Planning Institute.
4. My neighbour, Sonya, seventeen-year-old girl.
5. My cousin, Aminet, eighteen years old.

And all those who became acquainted with you in Ossetia.

Till we meet,

GEORGI.

Nogir Village,
Aug. 10, 1936.

DEAR COMRADE SEEMA,

I didn't write for so long because when your letter arrived I was having exams. Then I went to a summer camp of the Society of Aerial and Chemical Defence. . . .

There is much news in our lives. Everywhere people are discussing the proposed draft of the new constitution.[1] If you saw our Ordjonikidze now you wouldn't recognize it . . . new buildings, paved streets and parks. The workers' life is much

[1] A new and much more liberal constitution was adopted late in 1936 after nation-wide discussion. In includes: extension of the franchise to *all* citizens over the age of eighteen (certain groups were previously denied voting rights); removal of inequality in voting under which one city worker's vote formerly weighed as much as five peasant votes; direct elections to all governing bodies in place of indirect; secret ballot; guarantee of employment, of vacations with pay, of health care, pensions, free education, freedom of worship, and equal rights for women and for all nationalities and races.

better than when you were here. In some places the work-day has been cut down to six hours. In other places it is seven. . . .

In Nogir our family is finishing building a house. Soon it will be completed and I will be more free. . . .

In Nakrebo[1] they are all well. Vassili and Kaplan have not yet sent their boys down to school in Ordjonikidze but they say they will.

About the geological surveys in the mountains . . . they've found ores and metals and keep finding new ones at almost every step. . . .

I press your hand warmly,

GEORGI.

. . . . .

More articulate than Georgi is his classmate Khariton. Khariton, also a student in the Ossetian Pedagogical Institute, son of illiterate herdsmen, thinks that "to write a short letter, that is, to write hastily, is not to write at all!" He begins:

Ordjonikidze,
North Caucasus, USSR.
May 9, 1936.

RESPECTED COMRADE SEEMA,

Please accept warm greetings from Russia—not old Russia but a new flowering Russia. . . .

We're now preparing for exams, therefore I ask your forgiveness for delaying my letter.

You ask how the Stakhanov movement[2] is applicable in

[1] Chapters XXXII, XXXIII, and XXXIV.

[2] Many of the references in these letters can be understood only in the light of certain significant developments in Soviet life:

1. In May, 1935, Stalin called upon the country to pay greater attention to the individual: " . . . the old slogan 'Technique decides everything', which is a reflection of a period we have already passed through, a period in which we suffered from a famine in technical resources, must now be replaced by a new slogan, the slogan 'Cadres decide everything'. That is the main thing now . . . our leaders should display the most solicitous attitude toward our workers, 'little' and 'big', no matter in what sphere they are engaged, cultivating them assiduously, assisting them when they need support, encouraging them when they display their first successes, advancing them, and so forth. Yet, in practice we meet in a number of cases with a soulless, bureaucratic and positively outrageous attitude toward workers. This, indeed, explains why instead of being studied, and placed at their posts after

the Universities. Student Stakhanovites are those who are not tardy to classes or meetings of the political study circles; who make out a rigid plan as to hours of study and recreation and then carry it out in detail; who rest in a cultured manner, that is, by attending the theatre or cinema, reading literary works, etc. Hours spent on social work are also important.

On the basis of such a plan the student can reach the heights of science, can become not merely a dry academician, not only an educated man but a really learned man and a well-rounded individual. Only such people can keep step with our contemporary, joyous life and these people our country calls Stakhanovites.

Do we have such people in our Institute? Yes—as yet only ten or fifteen but in the near future their number will increase. . . .

Then follow three closely written pages about the Russian poet Mayakovsky who in 1936 came into great vogue after five or six years of neglect since his death.

. . . He was called 'mayak' (lighthouse) by his friends . . . and he was indeed a lighthouse of poetry. Interest in literature is developing now among the broad masses as never before. . . . In the Red Army, among students, at the factories and on the collective farms, this remarkable poet of the revolution shines on millions, widening the horizon of their lives. The tremendous gifts of Mayakovsky have not been lost. They have been held in the strong hands of people hungry for real art.

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being studied, people are frequently flung about like pawns. . . . It is time to realize that of all the valuable capital the world possesses, the most valuable and most decisive is people, cadres."

2. Stalin's words were received with the greatest enthusiasm by the country. It was this speech, the coal-miner Stakhanov has declared, which first led him to study ways of rationalizing his work, and thus gave birth to the drive for increased efficiency and higher productivity which swept like wildfire through the country—the Stakhanov movement."

3. A second important speech of Stalin's, at the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites in November, 1935, analyzed the causes of the rapid spread of the Stakhanov movement: " . . . first and foremost the radical improvement in the material welfare of the workers. Life was improved, comrades. Life has become more joyous. And when life is joyous, work goes well."

The slogan "life has improved, life has become joyous" was caught up by the country. In various forms it appears in many of the letters I have received from my friends.

. . . You can understand why the workers, freed of oppression and the death-dealing contradictions of capitalism, have raised so high the best and most talented poet of contemporary mankind. . . .

Don't conclude from my letter that Soviet citizen are interested only in Mayakovsky. That would be wrong. I'll be brief.

Old Russia had few peasants who owned books or could even read them. But now there are few peasant collective farmers who don't have the works of Nekrasov, Pushkin, Gorky, Sholokhov, Demyan Bedny and others.[1] There are few who do not keep informed about current events. Most, by far the most, have their own little libraries. . . .

I had asked Georgi if there was much inter-marriage between Ossetians and Russians. Khariton gives the answer.

Some sort of theory of races like that of Hitler, at one time existed here. But that time has gone for ever. For example:

An Ossetian would never have married a Russian girl. That was considered a disgrace. And an Ossetian girl could not even dream of marrying a Russian man . . . not only a Russian but one of any other nationality. The Russians, in their turn, did not marry into other nations. Thus was built the harsh, oppressive policy of Tsarist Russia.

Your friends may not believe even my letter but the builder of a socialist society is not of a character to fool you. For that reason I say again, nothing impels him to deceit.

In my family alone four cousins have married Russian girls. Of course among the more backward of the peasants this is less frequent; but among the more politically aware, it would be hard to count the number of such marriages. . . .

I am only twenty-three years old but even I remember when girls were not given in marriage from one district of Ossetia to another. They had to be kidnapped. But now people laugh at the idea of having to steal a wife.

In 1930 I went to Moscow to study. I still remember very well how my mother said to me, "Khariton, my son, if you should think of marrying a Russian girl—if you will think of that, then know that you will have forever killed your mother who reared you with her own blood "

[1] While the peasants' interest in literature has developed at a rate nothing short of phenomenal, I suspect that Khariton exaggerates a little in this particular statement.

What does she say now? "If you want happiness, love one another and live merrily, happily—not offending, not deceiving one another!" As you see, there's not one word about race now. I can give you many other facts but I think this is enough.

He tells me of the decision of the Council of People's Commissars and the Communist Party of April 10, 1936, giving prestige and honour to the teaching profession. Qualified teachers of elementary and middle schools are to be given special titles (certificates). Outstanding teachers will receive the title, "Honoured School Teacher." People without special pedagogic training will not be accepted as teachers after 1938. Before that date, however, they will have the opportunity of preparing themselves and taking an examination.

Salaries for teachers of elementary and middle schools have been doubled and trebled—that is, those who till now got 200 rubles are now getting 500 and 600. . . .

You have asked about living conditions. I don't yet say I am living "joyously and well", but I will write briefly about my past and you will see the difference.

My father died in 1918. My mother was left with five children. We went through the famine of 1921. One sister died. Four were left with mother. We had no horse, no cow and no strength with which to work. Mother worked as well as she could. She fed and reared us. The Soviet power helped her.

My elder sister and I entered school. Then my other brother and sister. We bought a horse. The collective made its appearance in 1928. We entered the collective, put in our horse and certain implements.

Now my youngest brother is an aviator. He flies from Tiflis over the Caucasus range into Svanetia.[1] He lives well and is happy. Now he has taken mother to live with him.

My eldest sister is a telephone operator. I am studying in the Pedagogical School. Have just entered the third year. My youngest sister, five years younger, is also studying here in the third year.

I don't know what you will conclude from this, but it seems

[1] A region of the high Caucasus, formerly inaccessible for many months of the year. Its people were so untouched by civilization that at the time of the Revolution they were still fighting their blood feuds in coats of mail.

to me that our life now is better and happier. The most important thing is that it becomes better every day.

My comrades send regards to you, your husband, and your friends. Special regards are sent by the girl whom I consider close to my heart.

For the time being, everything good to you. Be well. I wish you happiness.

I remain,
KHARITON ZAKHAROVICH SALAMOV.

. . . . .

Amet,[1] the Tartar school-teacher, who is a poet in his leisure moments, writes me nothing of his poetry but much of his collective farm on the Crimean steppe.

Collective Farm October,
Village Tashlishaikh-Eli,
Kurman-Kemelchi District,
Crimean Republic, USSR.
April 28, 1936.

RESPECTED COMRADE SEEMA RYNIN,

In my memory and in the memories of our collective farmers is your visit. . . . After you were here all our hopes and expectations of a good harvest materialized. For that we got a premium from the Crimean government. As a result our collective farmers are having a good, joyous, and well-to-do life.

Our Stallion "Abrek" won the district and province prizes in the races. We also have now another Abrek who will soon enter the races.

About Stakhanovites—we have them in our collective. I read your letter to all the men and women collective farmers. They thank you for the letter and ask me to tell you how much we have grown culturally in the last two years.

We have a club, with a good radio receiving set and a stage. We also have 500 books in the Red Corner. In the spring of this year we organized a laboratory hut.[2] In order to serve the cultural life of the women collective farmers we also have a nursery for fifty-five children.

Our collective has increased in membership. In place of 250 people we have now 400 in order to till the fields more thoroughly.

[1] Chapters XXVIII and XXIX.

[2] Experimental laboratory to study seed selection, effects of various fertilizers, depth of ploughing, etc., organized widely on collective farms throughout the country since 1934 and 1935.

Our farm has 115 milk cows in place of 45 when you were here. And all the collective farmers have their own milk cattle in their own barns, also. Our acreage has also increased and we have higher quality production. Our collective farmers got 20 kilograms of grain per workday last year.[1] In some places they got between 30 and 35.

You ask about Khatizhe Engalichev. As before, she works with the doctor conserving the health of our members. She has learned to ride a bicycle as she told you she would. We now have many bicycles in our village.

I was ill but because of yearly treatment feel well and am teaching as before. Thanks to our beloved leader of the people, teachers are also living joyously, culturally, and well-to-do.

If you will write us, we will tell you about our further achievements. Hearty greetings from me and those others whom you knew. I hope you will write us much news.

Comradely greetings,
AMET DEVLETCHAEV.

Sept. 18, 1936.

RESPECTED COMRADE SEEMA RYNIN,

. . . I apologize for not having answered your letter for so long. I was attending pedagogical courses for teachers for a month and a half. I have just arrived home and am answering right away. . . .

You know that we people of the Soviet Union are very fortunate. Our teacher, Comrade Stalin, is leading us on the path to Socialism. Now our former dreams have turned into reality . . . we have a happy life.

As proof of this I can give several examples. The farmers of Collective Farm October live much better than when you were here. The collective now has an automobile . . . collective farmers nearly all have bicycles. Illiteracy among them is liquidated. Each collective farmer gets a newspaper. Every collective farm around here has a Red Corner and a radio. Most of the young people in our village are studying in the middle and higher schools. The collective farmers are well-dressed and well-shod. . . .

[1] Twenty kilograms (44 pounds) of grain in payment for each workday (unit of work accomplished). There is usually an additional payment in money and in other food products. When I was on Amet's farm in 1934 its members had been paid 10 kilograms per workday out of the previous harvest, an exceptionally good "dividend" for that year.

Women have gone over to new styles. They read, discuss and study the Stalin constitution, and learn their rights. This year women are being drawn more and more into social work. Not in any capitalist country is there so much concern for women as there is here with us. Our government each year gives grants to aid mothers of seven children. We are fighting for a healthy socialist generation. In addition, pregnant women are relieved from work for four months with pay. In each collective children's nurseries are organized where women leave their children when they go to work. . . .

About myself—as before I work with the pupils every day and at night study to raise my own qualifications. I read literature and history of the party, and interest myself in the international situation. . . .

Now I have a few questions for you:

1. How do Americans look upon the flight of our heroes Levanevski and Levchenko from Los Angeles to Moscow?
2. Are Soviet motion pictures shown in America and how do Americans look upon them?
3. At whose expense are children of workers educated in America and are there many illiterate?

Our mosque has been turned into a club. We're opening it for the October holidays.

Regards to you from all the collective farmers.

With comradely greetings,

AMET DEVLETCHAEV.

. . . . . .

The Jewish woman collective farmer[1] in the Crimea who told me in 1934 that her farm (Goropashnik) would stand on its own feet if only its members quit wrangling and got to work, wrote me recently:

About that category of people who don't want to work, about poor leadership, general slovenliness in work and so on,—all those conditions have been almost entirely eliminated thanks to the Political Sections of the Machine Tractor Stations.

. . . . Our people have learned to regard work seriously, as every politically enlightened collective farmer should do, understanding that ours is a planned economy, and each col-

[1] Chapter XXVI.

lective farmer is one of the units bearing the responsibility for fulfilling the general government plan, and in particular, the plan of his own collective. . . .

We have a well-furnished club and are building a bath house. In general, the collective has a yearly building plan as well as a general plan of work. . . .

I and my family live well. We have a cow, two pigs, a calf, chickens.

My eldest daughter is a Komsomolka, studying in the pedagogical institute in Simferopol. My thirteen-year-old boy is in school, the six-year-old girl goes to a good kindergarten where she is taught, fed, and cared for at the expense of the collective farm. . . .

As for myself, I am studying now. You know that Comrade Stalin has said that women should be pushed into positions of leadership. Now the Commissariat of Agriculture has organized courses training active women for presidents and other leading positions on the farms, and I am in one of these courses. . . .

In a later letter she dwells on the fact that all nationalities in her country are equal:

. . . Members of all nationalities have the right to participate everywhere in the building of socialism. Yes, my dear friend . . . after suffering insults, degradation and poverty in the old days, we Jews are now equal with all the workers in the Union, and we are building a good, cultured, well-to-do life in the collectives. . . .

. . . . . .

Ushakov, the master gardener of Red Putilov Collective Farm,[1] after graduating his first class of apprentices gave a second six-months' course sponsored by the Fruit and Vegetable Trust. He writes that both courses are very successful:

The students left having assimilated well both theory and practice.

At the present time all the former students are working on state and collective farms, on vegetable and fruit plantations.

[1] Chapter XVI.

Their work is good both in the hothouses and in the fields. They are raising vegetables for the government and for the collective farmers, and starting fruit and vegetable nurseries. . . .

In some of our collective farms you can see fine flower-beds. There have developed among us specialists who get 500 centners of tomatoes from one hectare of land. . . .[1]

He tells me about the vegetable rarities which have appeared in his district, naming a special kind of cauliflower that only a botanist could appreciate.

Characteristically, Ushakov, the vegetable enthusiast, devotes his letter to listing all the fine plants they are raising in Plavsk district, and only as an after-thought does he add in a postscript:

At Red Putilov farm all is well. This year, from 17 hectares of garden land we got 90,000 rubles.

[1] A centner is 220 pounds; a hectare is about two and one-half acres.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SOVIET CITIZENS—1937 (*cont.*)

ELENA, THE KOMSOMOLKA with whom I shared the dentist's office,[1] has finished the ten-year school and entered the Institute of Communications. The course of study is difficult, she says, but the Komsomols find time "to dance, go to the theatre, and lead the social work".

Her letters, written in English, show that she has made progress since the days when I taught her to conjugate the verb "to be". She still runs afoul of the English idiom occasionally, however, as in a recent letter which began:

Don't think that I forget you; I think very often about, but I am very big pig, because I didn't answer letter. . . .

Old Marfusha still prays, weeps, dotes on her "little Elena" and encounters dozens of "punishments from heaven" every day.

. . . . . .

The Bolshevik Natashin[2] is too busy to write often or much, but I hear from his wife frequently.

He is no longer in the village. Soviet agricultural difficulties have been overcome and, as a result, the Political Sections of Machine Tractor Stations have been dissolved.[3]

With other "key men" Natashin was transferred in 1935 into the field of transport, one of the weakest links in the Soviet economy. He is now director of a Railroad Supply

[1] Chapter II.
[2] Chapter XIV.
[3] Another indication of improvement in the agricultural situation is the fact that in March, 1935, there were adopted new statutes for collective farms, ensuring a much greater degree of democratic control by collective farm members.

Manufacturing Plant near Moscow, and in recognition of his excellent work has been decorated with the government's "Insignia of Honour".

Apparently he enters into this job with the same zest that he brought to previous ones. He wrote me once in a footnote to his wife's letter:

. . . In the rush of work one forgets everything else. Life is work. But work is creative. I am busy with that and for that reason I think that life is good to me. . . .

His wife, Natasha, wrote a few months after my departure:

. . . We spend little time now thinking about food, dress, and every-day household worries. Because of that more, much, and even all one's attention is given to improved production in all fields, to better organization and realization of creative work. . . .

Take the schools and teachers. Salaries have been increased, teachers are not overburdened with too many classes. As a result the teaching is more thorough. Children learn more because of this and because requirements are more strict. Our fight for literacy is bringing excellent results. . . .

Of her young son, whom I knew as a nervous, almost "problem" child, she writes:

. . . Arthur has improved a great deal in discipline, does well in school, and is studying the cello. This summer he'll go again to a children's sanatorium. Life in the collective has a stabilizing effect upon him.

Her precocious daughter, Ruth,[1] as before, is interested in the exact sciences and in literature. For her excellent work as a Young Pioneer she was sent in 1935 to Camp Artek on the Black Sea, goal of Pioneers from the Arctic to Central Asia.[2]

[1] Chapter XXII.

[2] Camp Artek is pictured in the popular Soviet film "The New Gulliver".

Natasha's most recent letter contains this information:

You have doubtless read about the movement here for wives of engineers and technicians to help in the organization of the factories' social work.[1] I have become absorbed in this work —am president of the group in our factory. Of course we do not literally copy the work you read about in the papers, since every plant, like every family, has its own specific characteristics, weaknesses, and illnesses. At our plant we are conducting a great deal of social-educational work. We have organized a school for the liquidation of illiteracy. Right now we're reorganizing our Children's Combinat (the nursery and kindergarten) and are co-ordinating the work of all institutions connected with the plant.

There's work, you see, "up to the neck". In that respect I'm not far behind my husband."

. . . . . .

Naomi,[2] the pretty, pampered girl from Hollywood who liked movies and French-heeled slippers, has just gotten married to a young American, a naturalized Soviet citizen. Coming to the Soviet Union with three years of University training, the young man got a job as an unskilled factory worker, later leaving to serve two years in the Red Army. Now he is completing his last year at the University, expecting to graduate as an engineer.

Naomi still likes nice things. Her father spent all his vacation money on furniture with which to fit out her husband's bare room for her wedding-present. But she regards it as a matter of course that she should continue her job as an electrician in a laboratory, even though she has a husband and a home to take care of.

Her brother, the one-time "hundred per cent American", works full time in a Radio Factory, and, in addition, is studying at night in a Workers' Faculty in preparation for

[1] In 1936 a campaign was launched to bring wives of directors and technical personnel of industrial plants more directly into the stream of Soviet life. These women, many with higher educations, are doing valuable social work. Their services are unpaid, reward being the satisfaction of contributing to their country's development.

[2] Chapter XXII.

the University. Last year he applied for entrance to an Aviation school but was refused because he was still under eighteen. This year he expects to try again. He plays short-stop on the Moscow Foreign Workers' baseball team and recently toured Karelia (Soviet north-west) teaching the American game to the Karelians.

Naomi's father, a one-time prosperous American business man, now a travelling buyer for a hardware trust, is more ardent than ever in his support of the Soviet system. He boasts that when the Ten-Year Plan of Reconstruction is completed Moscow will be "the world's finest city".

He wrote me from Pavlovo, near Gorki (formerly Nizhni-Novgorod), a small town to which he goes periodically on buying trips:

I used to know this region in 1907 and 1908. The famous industrialists Kondratov and Zavyalov each had a factory here, manufacturing knives, forks, locks, and so on. In addition they used to buy for a pittance the articles produced by local artisans with the aid of their wives and children. There was frightful poverty among the artisans but the manufacturers rode around in fancy carriages and lived in luxury.

Now these artisans are combined in artels of which there are a hundred right around here. They're joined together in a union of metal workers' artels which furnishes them with raw materials and buys their wares to be distributed all over the Soviet Union and abroad. . . .

He describes a celebration of Stakhanovites, participated in by men and women who came ten miles on sleighs to one of the government factories. They ate, drank and danced, kerchiefed women in felt boots dancing with the plant director. Then came the serious part of the programme, the awarding of premiums for good work during which leading Stakhanovites told how the new methods of work gave them the opportunity to earn more and live better.

. . . Such gatherings are held often throughout the nation. One feels that life is boiling not only in the centre but in far-away corners of the country like this.

Anne, the American friend with whom we went to the Caucasus, fell seriously ill shortly after our return, and spent many months in a sanatorium at state expense. Her account of her leavetaking from the institution is amusing:

. . . When it came time for my departure it was discovered that I had returned all the government's underwear the next day after my arrival, three months before, without having had it checked off my receipt. It was most embarrassing because by then we had a new manager and nobody was responsible except me and I could not produce the "government's underwear" and similar objects.

It was the "skandal" of the sanatorium and people not even in either of the two buildings where I had lived and even people down the road in the village would greet me sympathetically and anxiously and ask if I had yet found the government's underdrawers. People all defended me and blamed the administration because how could I, a foreigner, know anything about receipts? They all pampered me to death, anyway, and took my side in every "skandal", of which there were many. It looked as if I would be there another month getting this straightened out but the director obligingly wrote them off my accounts the morning I was due to leave and probably considered he got off lightly at that.

You should have seen me in the government's cotton underwear, by the way. First it was a pair of coarse white cotton pants that wrapped around me twice and hung half way to my ankles. I then weighed 98 pounds. Then there was a sort of from-shoulder-to-knee sack that also went around twice, and a cotton dress that also just reached the knee, leaving the aforementioned drawers hanging down below. The nurse gave one look and suggested tactfully that perhaps in my case I would be allowed to wear my own clothes. Hence all the difficulties upon leaving. . . .

Toward the end of 1935 I sent her a few "Russian famine stories" clipped from various American papers, and remarked that it was a pity some of the Americans in the USSR could not tell America what the true situation was. She replied:

I am not sure you could get up much enthusiasm over combating famine stories here. We feel too secure to bother.

She gave a long list of foods available on the open market at greatly reduced prices following the abolition of rationing, and concluded:

> Never have I seen such abundance and variety of foods as you have here. . . . Even in our office dining-room we have choice of two entrées, and since we have no wholesale supply base, have the whole open market to choose from. Our initial slogan was "down with macaroni and meat balls" so now we have a vegetable dinner and a meat or fish dinner—yes, vegetables, salads, and what will you?

Anne's comments on the present increased attention to the individual are flip and exaggerated, but indicative of the trend:

> Whereas when you were here emphasis was on the machine, now it is on the man, and if you say "my light won't work", people tremble in their boots till they get it fixed immediately that day because it is a violation of the party line not to care for the individual. . . .

Alexandra Andreevna,[1] the teacher who could not abide "the philistinism of Americans", has transferred to another school but still continues to make life miserable for the bureaucrats (and to be made miserable by them). She writes much about the material progress of her country and about the kind of life the new society is striving to build:

> . . . As a child you must often have heard stories of good fairies who with one wave of the wand changed beggars into rich and happy people. Adults laugh at these stories, since they are sure that in life everything happens just the opposite—often the rich take everything away from the others, and rarely do they give anything.
>
> But here we have lived through just such a magic transformation in real life.[2] When rationing was abolished, our

[1] Chapter XXIII.

[2] Behind the more visible aspects of improvement in every-day life is the fact that the Soviets have been able to turn their attention to production of consumers' goods because they have already built up their means of produc-

stores became filled with first-class goods almost overnight, the queues disappeared, luxurious shops opened up and they have even begun to advertise over the radio to invite patronage. . . . If you have no time, or don't want to go shopping, please telephone, and all will be delivered in excellent shape. That's how we work now.

At first I couldn't believe my eyes, and on free days used to love to go to the stores just to see the happy crowds of buyers. . . . The food problem is definitely settled. Hitler and the Fascists are needlessly concerned about us.

You saw us in need. A pity you can't see us now. You'd not recognize us. Such dresses and hats! Long queues only for newspapers. Recently I stood for an hour and a half to get the *Izvestia*. Near me was an old woman who kept complaining that at home there was lots to do. She'd get angry, impatient, go away and return again.

"No—I'll stand a little longer," she said. "Otherwise they'll be grabbed up and I'll be left without a paper. Here I am, illiterate, but I can't get along without a paper."

"What do you need a paper for if you can't read?" I asked.

"Oh, I'll find somebody. I'll put the samovar on and treat him to tea. And he'll read me the paper. But I can't be without a paper! Life's so dull without the news. . . ."

. . . Our people live a good, full, meaningful life. In this huge country there is no unemployment and there are no hungry. Ahead of us there is, of course, still much work and much to be concerned about. Probably the main problem now is to finish off bureaucracy, which still exists, and learn to work well.

In a later letter her mood has changed. She again touches on the subject of bureaucracy, a sore one with her:

Greetings from the Volga! I'm on a river boat going from Moscow to Ufa and back, a seventeen-day trip. When I look at these wonderful shores I forget about everything else.

What is there to say . . . the world is good! Maybe in a generation or two life also will be good and meaningful. But for the present generation things will not be easy. To rebuild our life is difficult, though not to rebuild it is even harder.

---

tion; the terrific pace with which they were during the First Five-Year Plan and part of the Second building up a heavy industry to make themselves independent of foreign powers, has brought results. In 1936 they produced 16,000,000 tons of steel, third in the world; once-backward Russia thus takes its place as a great industrial power.

We are justly proud that we are re-educating the "bezprizorni" and turning the criminals into honest citizens. It's a great work, a notable victory. The masses are good; in them there is much that is healthy and noble. But how are we to remake those who apparently serve the new life and are faithful to the letter of the constitution, but within whom everything is rotten?

How can we re-educate our bureaucrats and those who have the souls of petty bourgeoisie? How conquer their monstrous egoism, their striving and ability to arrange their lives at the expense of anyone and anything? They are much more harmful than all the bezprizorni and criminals. . . .

Alexandra admits that her high standards make her see bureaucrats where others would not; that she expects much of people. "Often," she writes, "I feel myself a Don Quixote, but I can't make myself over." Then, lest I think too ill of her people, she adds:

You should know that besides bureaucrats we have good and devoted people. For example, K——, who has just died. I think you met him,—tall, broad-shouldered, with a plain, kindly face marked with a scar (he fought in three wars), heavy breathing, a hoarse voice and a muddy bluish skin, due to the fact that his heart and lungs were in bad condition.

He was in charge of supplying equipment to non-ferrous metal plants all over the whole Soviet Union. You can imagine how difficult and nerve-wracking that job has been. Yet he found time to study at night.

"I don't recognize any grades but 'excellent'," he used to say. "If you're going to study, then study!" When his health made it impossible to study, he would go fishing or start drinking.

His son was an aviator. He was in an accident, got scared, and changed to other work. This grieved the father.

"If I set myself a goal I would die but I would attain it," he used to say. And this was just the way he worked.

Last summer, after a year of hard work and study, he declined to take his vacation, because there was a rush of work. He went instead to Central Asia to straighten out some trouble at a new plant. He didn't even take the vacation money he had coming to him.

In January someone had to go to the Altai to see about a plant that had had a serious breakdown. He wanted his assistant

to go but the young man refused. So he went himself. On the way the train stalled in deep snow. They had to spend ten days clearing the tracks, eating stale bread and snow. He got sick. They sent him to the hospital on a stretcher and urged him to go back to Moscow. He refused, saying: "This is an order from Ordjonikidze.[1] It must be carried out."

By the time he finished his task and returned to Moscow he was seriously ill. He refused to take a rest and went back to work. Two days later he died.

In the coffin he lay peaceful and apparently younger. It seemed that he was resting well for the first time in fifty years. . . .

The pity is that there are not many such devoted people and that we don't know how to cherish them. Often our bureaucrats build a good life at their expense.

The trade union administration of the factory her school served evidently realized that she was a devoted person who should be cherished, though she was often a gadfly making their lives miserable. Her next letter said:

I have been given a free pass to a rest home near Moscow for eleven days—will be treated for poor metabolism. Before exams I was very busy . . . worked twelve hours a day with my students. . . .

I once sent greetings to Alexandra via an American tourist acquaintance. The latter was a romantic gushing soul who carried to Moscow a highly idealized picture of the USSR as a veritable paradise (organized on socialist lines) and all its citizens as admirable "heroes of socialist construction". Alexandra wrote, a little sadly:

. . . I am always sorry to meet Americans and other foreigners who have too exalted notions of us and our life. They are doomed to disillusion that may sometimes end badly. There is much for which we must be respected, and much that can be learned here, but the past is felt at every step.

We have yet to work long over ourselves and to work, fight, and clean up around ourselves a great deal so that our daily life will correspond to these sometimes naïve notions which some foreigners evolve far away from us. . . .

[1] The late Commissar of Heavy Industry.

I am writing this letter on good paper—your production. But the ink and pen are our production and both are of very poor quality. Yes, we still have much to learn from you.

When the new laws for the protection of the family were adopted (involving stricter regulation of divorce and of parents' responsibility for children, increased state aid to mothers and a ban on abortion except when required for health considerations), Alexandra wrote me:

Much is being done here to strengthen the family. Forbidding abortions will also help bring about this goal, I think. Of course we long ago stopped believing in the sanctity of the family.

I would have felt little concern about the instability of some families, particularly among our youth, if the government could have assured the proper upbringing of the children when the family fell apart.

But for the time being that is beyond our powers. It becomes necessary to strengthen the family. Well, what? If we create a family which does not have as its foundation the economic dependence of women, in which there is no place for their subjection and for the maltreatment of children as was the case in pre-revolutionary Russia—a family which will not be supplemented by prostitution and for which the question of separation will not be decided by the church or the state—then, with such a family it will be possible, for a period, to reconcile one's self.

Her later letter was written shortly before the USSR announced that it would not be bound by a "neutrality" which prevented non-Fascist states from aiding the Spanish democracy but left Italy and Germany free to ship men and arms to Spain. She described the enthusiasm with which food and supplies for women and children of Spain were being contributed all over the USSR, and concluded:

What a marvellous people are the Spaniards! They're showing the whole world how to fight Fascism. Now everyone can see on whose side is the power of the people. Of course we are not helping them as much as we would like. But I assure you the blame for that is neither cowardice nor egoism.

Alexandra's neighbour, Zenaida,[1] the beautiful woman Communist whose husband divorced her because her work had for years prevented their living together, has remarried. Of her Alexandra writes:

She says the old love is "all burned out". But I think this isn't so. Judging by her manner when her first husband's name is mentioned, I think the pain is still there. . . . But she has work and interests which fill her life and which she places higher than personal ties. The general character of our life softens the bitterness of personal experiences of this sort.

. . . . . .

Most often I hear from Tamara,[2] wife of the literary critic, my best friend in Moscow. Tamara worked for a time in the editorial offices of the French newspaper *Journal de Moscou*. Now she is helping her husband compile and edit the works of Mayakovsky. Her chatty letters are a calendar of Soviet growth.

There's everything one wants in the stores. Recently Kolya and I went into a delicatessen and fussed for a long time about what we would buy. We didn't want this and we didn't want that. And suddenly we remembered how two years ago we pounced on anything there was. If there was butter, we grabbed butter; if canned fish, it was canned fish; if it was herring, then herring. But now—there are twelve kinds of cheese alone, three of them imported. We've got imported conserves, cheeses and so on. And much that was formerly exported is now put on the local market. . . .

You ask if Masha still has to spend much time shopping at the market. No. She doesn't go there. I get what we need on my walks or Masha runs out to the corner and gets everything, at prices not much higher than they used to be in the "closed co-operatives" for which we had to go to opposite ends of town. Prices are to come down again in two months. . . . So many kinds of bread on sale as you never saw when you were here. We have automats in the subway stations and in stores, selling cakes, candies, and cigarettes. Stands on the street sell hot tarts and sausages. All kinds of jams and jellies and canned fruits and vegetables at attainable prices.

[1] Chapter XXIII. [2] Chapter III.

Dress material of every kind is obtainable—from calico to velvet, but prices are very high. . . . As to hose, the situation is first-rate, many kinds of silk and rayon hose ranging in price from 70 kopeks to 20 rubles a pair. It's true, they're not as good as foreign but they can be worn.

If you have an opportunity please send me some light-coloured lipstick, not too greasy. They've stopped making my shade here and the dark is unbecoming to me.

Later on she told me that Masha had left her employ to take a job in an auto accessory plant. Masha liked her new work and Tamara had, in her place, a quiet little old woman who was a good cook and had a mild temper.

Shortly after the opening of the subway she wrote:

When I returned from the resort I hardly got out of the subway for two days because it was so beautiful and clean. I thought this cleanliness was not for long—that soon it would be dirty and spat upon. But no—the cleanliness remains. And mostly because the passengers themselves look after it.

For instance, this. A child threw his tram ticket on the pavement. His mother made him pick it up and put it in the trash can. And how indignantly everybody shouted at a youth who threw his cigarette butt on the floor! He spent a long time apologizing to the surrounding passengers for his carelessness.

At one station a tile had been removed, apparently for some repair. (Most stations are faced with milky-white tiles). The passengers kept coming up to the attendant and asking worriedly—was the tile broken—why was it removed—it wasn't pleasing to have that ugly black hole on this white surface—would they put it back soon—and so on and on.

In general, everyone in the subway is on his best behaviour . . . no scolding, no pushing, nothing like the trams. The workers are all very efficient and attentive. Lots of people come from the provinces to see the subway. They walk around it, feel the facing, go riding on the escalators with beaming faces. In a word, the subway, "it's the thing".

Tamara's son, Kolinka, has quite grown up, cleans his teeth without sobbing and has even asked to be given music lessons.

He's mad about the theatre. Goes almost every day to see some picture or play and then re-enacts everything he saw with

the youngsters in the yard. He attends a dramatic circle across the street at the Construction Workers' Club, and drives me half crazy with declamation and singing. Apparently he will be an actor.

Kolinka tore himself away from his other pursuits once to write me a letter.

DEAR SEEMA:

I am studying in a new school. Now there are many writing accessories. Before a notebook cost 59 kopeks but now they're 10 kopeks apiece.

The subway is built and the Chinese Wall has been taken down. The Mossoviet hotel is built and Sadovo-Triumphalni Square has been renamed Mayakovsky Square. Mishka has begun to run after the little black dog that lives next door and got two scratches on his back and on his neck. Besides that his left eye was bruised.

At school we have a pioneer gathering every six days. We play and read and so on. Today Kruppskaya[1] was supposed to come to us but she was detained and did not get there till half-past eight so I didn't see her.

On the 22nd we baked tarts. Moscow has gotten much warmer. Now it's raining.

Grandma, Liza, and Leah are living well. Leah is going to school.

I kiss you warmly, KOLYA.

Of the discussion which preceded the tightening up of the divorce and alimony regulations, and the passing of the anti-abortion law, Tamara wrote:

The law prohibiting abortions caused stormy discussion for some time. I got quite excited and even wrote a letter to the press about it. In the end it was passed because most of the population was in favour. . . . Six million rubles has been allotted for the building of another factory producing contraceptives. Everything that is produced is available in any drug store.

All sorts of privileges are being given to women bearing children . . . many maternity hospitals are being built, tremen-

[1] Kruppskaya is Lenin's widow, Assistant Commissar of Education for the RSFSR (Great Russian Republic).

dous funds assigned for crèches, kindergartens, etc. Two thousand rubles a year for five years is being paid to women bearing a seventh child (or any higher than seven).

Recently a law was passed making criminally liable anyone refusing to employ a pregnant women or who discharges one because she is pregnant. Penalty for breaking the law is several years' imprisonment.

Laws about paying of alimony have been made stricter. . . . Abortions are forbidden on the one hand and, on the other, the government, understanding the difficulties of rearing large families, tries to lighten as much as possible the difficulties involved in motherhood.

In the same letter in which she discussed the above, she wrote:

The whole USSR is terribly disturbed about events in Spain. A great deal of money has been collected; three ship-loads of provisions have already departed for Spain.

In another letter she wrote:

There has developed a tremendous interest in Mayakovsky. Stalin himself said of him that he was the best and most talented poet of the Soviet epoch and that indifference to his memory and his works was a crime. And since Kolya has been working all these years on Mayakovsky and is now one of the best experts about him, we have been swamped with work.

Kolya gives addresses and writes articles and compiles collections of Mayakovsky's works and edits his books. He doesn't even have time left to write his scolding articles. I suspect that many writers are breathing more easily for the time being.

I cannot do better than to conclude this account of Soviet people with a paragraph from one of Tamara's letters written in February, 1936:

Since the main problem—food—is settled, people are developing a tremendous interest in the arts. This explains, too, the tremendous interest in Mayakovsky. People have the necessities. Now they want to dress well, hear good music, good poetry, and see good plays.

In a word, Seema, life is good!

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